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Thesis

A HISTORY OF THE SONNET, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO ENGLAND AND AMERICA

Submitted by
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(A. B., Bates, 1921)

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INTRODUCTION

The sonnet as a poetic form enjoys an historical and integral importance far out of proportion to its size. Historically, it appears to have been, first, a happy invention crowning the age-old search of poets to express most fittingly some universal truth inherent in a particular experience; second, a difficult training school for Elizabethan poets who thereby were enabled to attain the artistic heights of that golden period; and, last, a satisfying form to which modern authors, somewhat weary of their diverse explorations into free and imagist versification, are beginning to turn as a capable medium for their profoundest and most personal utterance. Integrally, it has come to mean to sensitive critical and creative minds a type of poem whose distinctive pattern is the result, not of chance or subjective mood, but of everlasting laws governing rhythm and melody; whose length is great enough to permit, and not so great as to inhibit, a consistent temper of genuinely high poetry; and whose compass of potential subject-matter

has encountered no limit.

It is unfortunate that the sonnet has been held so generally in the past to be an interesting but not supremely worthy nor significant poetic cast. Shakespeare speaks of it as "lime" to tangle a loved one's desires;¹ Wordsworth likens it to a "glow-worm lamp",² a "convent room",³ a "pastime";³ Watts-Dunton⁴ can say of it only that it has "a peculiar fascination for poets of the first class".

In truth, the sonnet form has more than one legitimate claim to greatness. Practically all great English poetry from Chaucer's time to the present has employed the sonnet's decasyllabic line.⁵ Then, too, great poetry and great sonnets have been coincident in point of time; when one has ceased to be produced, the other has ceased also.

It is, accordingly, of considerable moment

¹"Two Gentlemen of Verona," III, 2, 68.

²Sonnet: "Scorn not the sonnet".

³Sonnet: "Nuns fret not at their narrow convent room".

⁴Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th edition, v. XXV, p. 415.

⁵Consider Chaucer, Marlowe, the Elizabethan sonnets and dramas, Milton, Wordsworth, Fitz-Gerald, and Tennyson.

that we set up serious standards to aid us in estimating the value of individual sonnets, sonnet writers, and sonnet periods. Looking over the seven hundred years that have elapsed since the invention of the sonnet, we must remark the numerous and varied experimental efforts on the part of writers in Italy and France as well as England and America. Comparison of merit brings us to one conclusion: namely, that sonnet emotion and idea tends to be best expressed through one of the two formal media known as the Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnet schemes, that deviation from established form in this respect results in regrettable imperfection of expression. Sublime as a sonnet conception and execution may be even if formal lapses are present, its nobility of thought would be more purely transmitted if made to conform to the systems of rhyme and rhythm which seven centuries of trial and error have vindicated.

In the following study, therefore, sonnet excellence will be judged along rather formal lines, the main points of which will be: (1) The fourteen lines of the sonnet must show a division into an octet and sestet; the former to be of eight lines and the latter to be of six lines. (2) Both octet and sestet must develop within

themselves, without violating the unity of the sonnet as a whole. (3) The function of the octet must be narrative, descriptive, expository, or the like with its accompanying sestet pointing the universal significance of the experience recorded in the octet. (4) The rhymes shall be according to one of the following three plans: the Petrarchan ABBAABBA CDECDE; the Petrarchan ABBAABBA CDCDCD; or the Shakespearean ABABCD CD EFEFGG. (5) Rhyme sounds shall be so chosen as to avoid weak effects, Alexandrines, diphthongs, approximations, hackneyed sounds, and any suggestion of strain; they shall show absolute variety of both consonant and vowel sound in rhyme changes. (6) No word in the entire sonnet must be open to the charge of superfluity. (7) Any phrase suggestive of prosaism, redundancy, archaism, a foreign speech, rare structural consequence, or strain of any sort must be excluded. (8) Rhythm must be regular but not monotonous, varied in accent, and expressive of emotion; it should avoid a noticeable number of interlinear breaks.

In short, anything considered undesirable in a poem is to be considered impermissible in the sonnet.

CHAPTER ONE

THE INVENTION OF THE SONNET

The sonnet originated in Palermo, Sicily, at the court of Frederick II, Emperor of Germany, probably not earlier than 1220 A. D. It was no full-panoplied conceit, no habit cut from whole cloth; both octet and sestet were derived from established forms. What the derivative forms were still furnishes ground for considerable debate. These were the circumstances pertinent to its nativity:

Italian poetic literature, like the Homeric stream, seemed to spring spontaneously from a dearth extending for a period of six hundred years into broad and cultured maturity, soon overtopping the excruciating barbarities of its neighbor nations' older literatures. It would seem that the genius of the Italian people for creating beauty could not be suppressed indefinitely, that it must imperatively appear and suddenly stride forward in swift strength.

After Boethius (c. 530 A. D.), there appeared no non-utilitarian literature. Latin, the nation's literary vehicle, died, surviving the barbarian conquest only in church services, in the relics of law, science, divinity,

and as a medium of instruction. Five hundred years later certain eminent theologians wrote treatises in the still debased popular dialects, and in the same century, the musical reforms of Guido of Arezzo resulted in composition of poetic chants. In the twelfth century groups of wandering students, called Goliardi, began to compose Latin songs. Also in this period, Provence, being nearest to the French and farthest from the Latin influence, and therefore, being the first of all the Latin nations to acquire a capable vernacular language, developed a court poetry. Prince-favored poets vied with each other in contests they call tenzone, developing in their effusions common characteristics of artificiality emphasized by extremities of form. This tendency was inevitable in a tongue so rich in rhyming possibilities. About 1175 princes in Northern Italy brought Provençal troubadours to their courts to sing Provençal songs. It becomes strikingly clear, then, that the Sicilian school of vernacular poetry under the patronage of Frederick was noted for more than its creation of the sonnet, it marked as well the beginning of Italian literature.

Sicily had long been the scene of conflicting civilizations, religions, and races. Italians, Greeks,

Arabs, and Jews lived side by side. Greek, Latin, and Arabic were the official languages; the common people used the crude Italian in place of Latin; and the courts employed French. In this strange mixture of personality, clime, creed, and tongue, the Arabs were unquestionably the intellectual leaders.

Detailed studies of the origin of the sonnet have been made by K. Witte¹, H. Welti², L. Biadine³, A. Foresti⁴, and E. H. Wilkins⁵. Of these, Wilkins' is the most recent and reliable. He concludes: "The group of the earliest extant sonnets⁶ consists of thirty-one poems, twenty-five by Giacomo da Lentino⁷, and six by

-
- ¹ Preface to Hundert Sonette von Eugen Baron von Vaerst und Zwei Freunden, Breslau, 1825.
- ² Geschichte des Sonettes in der Deutschen Dichtung, Leipzig, 1884, p. 31-37. Report and criticism of Witte's study.
- ³ Morfologia del Sonetto nei Sec. XIII e XIV, in "Studj di Fil. Rom.," IV (1889): 4-30, 34-36, 42-44, 215-219.
- ⁴ Nuove osservazione intorno all' origine e alle variet  metriche del sonetto (Estratto dall' XII Vol. degli Atti' dell' Ateneo de Bergamo), 1895, p. 9-19.
- ⁵ The Invention of the Sonnet, "Modern Philology", Chicago, 1915, p. 464-494.
- ⁶ See, The Extant Repertory of the Early Sicilian Poets, in "Publications of the Modern Language Association", 1913, Vol. XXVIII, p. 468-472, 492-496.
- ⁷ See, The Poetry of Giacomo da Lentino, ed. E. F. Langley, Cambridge, 1915.

four of his associates. The sonnet consisted originally of fourteen hendecasyllables, and was divided into octave and sestet. The octave rhymed ABABABAB, and was subdivided into four distichs. A division into quatrains was probably recognized, but regarded as distinctly subordinate to the division into distichs. The sestet, in all probability, rhymed CDECDE, and was divided into tercets. The sonnet was an artistic invention; its inventor was in all probability Giacomo da Lentino.⁸ The octave of the sonnet

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Wilkins makes an interesting speculation concerning the identity of the very first sonnet. "The chances are", he argues, "that it is rather one of the sonnets of Giacomo da Lentino...one whose authority is undisputed...one of those rhyming in the sestet, CDECDE. This leaves eleven sonnets: Nos. 9-12, 14, 18, 19, 21, 22, 25, 26. Six of these, however, have some formal characteristics that are secondary rather than primitive. Nos. 9 and 10 have equivocal rhyme; nos. 21 and 25 have internal rhyme; in no. 22 the pause in sense at the end of the octave is notably slight; in no. 18 there is no pause in sense after the third line of the sestet. This leaves five sonnets, nos. 11, 12, 14, 19, 26, which appear to be purely primitive in form. Three of these are of special, and presumably secondary character in content. No. 26 is the one purely didactic sonnet in the group; no. 19 is semi-didactic; and no. 14 is an artificial array of paradoxes. The two remaining sonnets are both love poems of the normal type. No. 11 is the more general of the two, and might well have been written at any time. No. 12 reflects a particular situation; and that situation is clearly a secondary stage in a love affair: "vostri sembianti mi nostraro isperanza d'amore----or vi mostrate irata." No. 11, then, "Molti amadori la los malatia," is more completely primitive in character than any of the other sonnets; and has therefore a slightly more plausible claim than any other to be regarded as the earliest extant sonnet." Ibid., p. 493-494.

was taken from the regular eight-line Sicilian strambotto.⁹ The source of the sestet is uncertain: it may have been suggested by a Sicilian variety of the popular Arabic zagal.¹⁰ The current theory that the sonnet is a combination of the eight-line strambotto and a six-line strambotto is untenable in its suggestion of a six-line

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The lyric forms of Italian poets are:

(1) The canzone. This has several varieties of stanza structure. The one most general is: Lines 1-6 are hendecasyllabic and rhyme ABCABC, line 7 is of uncertain length and rhymes with one of the preceding six, and the following five or six lines are short or long as the discretion of the poet dictates and rhyme DCDEE.

(2) The sonetto.

(3) The ballata. Strict rules govern this form. It has two or more stanzas. The theme is stated in the first and amplified in the following, often being terminated with a summarizing stanza, or envoy.

(4) The octave, a type of strambotto. The octave is generally narrative, but is sometimes lyrical. It is hendecasyllabic and rhymes ABABABAB. The differing technique of the lyrical and narrative octave is described respectively in an English imitation, the last four lines of which are:

Six streaming lines amass the arrowy might
In hers, one cataract couplet doth expend.
Thine lakewise widens, level in the light
And like to its beginning is its end.

(5) The sestine. This is a six-line, six-stanza poem with a very complicated rhyme scheme. If stanza one rhymes ABCDEF, stanza two must rhyme FAEBDC, stanza three CFDABE, and etc. An envoi BDF completes the poem. A seventh stanza would revert to ABCDEF. Each letter stands for a terminal word, not a syllabic sound.

(6) Terza rima, "Third rhyme", follows the pattern:
ABA BCB CDC DED EFE indefinitely.

(7) Madrigali vary in form. They have from six to thirteen short iambic lines on three rhymes.

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The zagal is a poem of six-lined stanzas rhyming ABCABC, DEFDEF, etc.

strambotto as source of the sestet. The current theory that the sonnet is a canzone stanza is quite untenable."¹¹

There are extant thirty-one sonnets written by poets of the Frederician group presumably between 1220 and 1250. Twenty-five of these are accorded to the leader of the group, Giacomo da Lentino, three to Abbot of Tivoli, and one each to Jacopo Mostacci, Piero della Vigne, and Monaldo d' Aquino. Younger sonneteers of this group were King Enzo, Rinaldo d' Aquino, Guglielmo Bervardi, and Mazzeo de Ricco.

So much for the development of the sonnet form. The sonnet idea, if we consider it to be a descriptive or narrative setting in the octet with a suggestion of universal or personal significance in the sestet, seems to have been present in nearly every literature, however ancient. David Morton¹² offers several enlightening examples illustrating the similarity between the sonnet idea and that of a Tuscany folk song, a Greek epigram, a portion of the Egyptian "Book of the Dead", a passage from the "Vedas" of

¹¹

Ibid., p. 494.

¹²

The Sonnet Today--and Yesterday, New York and London, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1926.

the Brahmans, a psalm of the Old Testament, and a Japanese "Tanka" or "Hokku". The strength of his argument becomes apparent even when one casually peruses such specimens as the following:

(1) Folk song of Tuscany:

I stand at the window and gaze at the sea,
I watch all the fishing boats coming to lee;--
The boat of my sweetheart it comes not to me.

(2) Greek epigram:

Home to their stalls at eve the oxen came
Down from the mountains through the snow wreaths deep,
But, ah, Therimachus sleeps the long sleep
'Neath yonder oak, lulled by the levin flame.

(3) The 126th Psalm:

When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion,
We were like them that dream.
Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our
tongues with singing:
Then said they among the heathen,
The Lord hath done great things for them.
The Lord hath done great things for us,
Whereof, we are glad.

Turn again, our captivity, O Lord, as the streams
in the South.
They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.
He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed,
Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing,
Bringing his sheaves with him.

(4) Hokku:

Old battlefield, fresh with spring flowers again--
All that is left of the dream
Of twice ten thousand warriors slain.

It is reasonable to suppose that the sonnet is more than a happy discovery by a pioneer of poesy in a language flexibly rich in rhyme and rhythm, that it is indeed the culmination of age-long striving for adequate expression of a unified personal conception or experience.

CHAPTER TWO

ITALIAN SONNETRY

The Frederician Court Poets (1220-1250).

The poets whose work the Italian-blooded Frederick II¹ encouraged were men of high standing in their community and society. LENTINO, their leader, appears to have been lawyer, gentleman, and sportsman as well as poet. Similar occupations probably distinguished his fellow members. Their sonnets are crude productions from our modern point of view, but justly honored in their setting. Ernesto Grillo² avers that, "The poetry of Giacomo da Lentino displays originality and a consummate art." To the charge that the ideology of early Italian poetry was derived bodily from Provence he replies: "Provençal influence is insufficient to account for the genesis of Italian lyrical poetry; apart from the difference of form, Italian poetry has in its content much that the

¹ For an adequate account of Frederick II, see: Sedgwick, H. D., Italy in the Thirteenth Century, Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1912. Vol. 1.

² Early Italian Literature with critical introductions by Ernesto Grillo, Blackie and Son, Ltd., London, 1920. Vol. 1, "Pre-Dante Poetical Schools", p. 27.

Provençal could not have given it, because it had it not to give, viz., the philosophical element."³ The sonnets were generally written on amorous themes, although occasionally a eulogistic or religious mood would be the inspiration. The structure definitely employed was: octet, ABAB ABAB; sestet, either CDE CDE or CDC DCD. The latter sestet scheme was used in the following sonnet, "Io m'aggio posto in core a Dio servire," attributed to Giacomo da Lentino:⁴

I have it in my heart to serve God so
That into Paradise I shall repair, --
The holy place through the which everywhere
I have heard say that joy and solace flow.
Without my lady I were loath to go, --
She who has the bright face and the bright hair;
Because if she were absent, I being there,
My pleasure would be less than nought, I know.
Look you, I say not this to such intent
As that I there would deal in any sin:
I only would behold her gracious mien,
And beautiful soft eyes and lovely face,
That so it should be my complete content
To see my lady joyful in her place.

The Sicilian school of poetry fused the non-descript dialects into a more flexible, melodious Italian purged of Latin and provincial impurities, bequeathing to the minds that were to come -- to Guinicelli, Dante,

³
Ibid., p. 31

⁴
Translation by Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Petrarch, Ariosto, Tasso -- a language more musical than Europe had known for 1500 years.

Two exceptions to the Sicilian monopoly of poetic achievement require mention, although they have no direct connection with sonnet literature. ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI wrote poems on pious themes, his best known being the canticle, "Laudes Creatorium," the first line of which is, "Altissimu, omnipotente, bon signore"; and CIELO D' ALCAMO left us a dialogue between lover and lady, beginning: "Rosa fresca aulentissima e' apar' in ver la state".

Fore-Runners of Dante.

Two schools of poetry arose to prominence after the Sicilian: one in Tuscany, the other in Bologna.

GUIDO GUINICELLI of Bologna, gentle, sensitive, was the first poet of high merit that Italy produced. He is supposed to have lived between the years 1220-1276, although he may have been born as much as thirty years later and died a young man. It is known, however, that he was a definite and worthy influence upon Dante. His sonnets imitate the Sicilian structure: ABAB ABAB CDC DCD or CDE CDE. His less illustrious fellows, ONESTO BOLOGNESE, PILIZARO DA BOLOGNA, and BERNARDO DA BOLOGNA,

continued in the Sicilian style.

Of the Tuscans GUITTONE D'ARREZZO is the most distinguished. Born at Santa Formena, near Arezzo, about 1235, he was the first man to stamp the sonnet with its definite poetic form. In his early life he wrote voluminously on subjects of love, but religious zeal acquired in middle life led to his joining the military order of the Cavalieri de Santa Maria and effectively stifled his poetic impulses except as they were intermittently loosed upon moral themes. In structure, he provides us with the classic Petrarchan model: ABBA ABBA CDE CDE. Most vivid of his contemporaries is the satirist, RUSTICO DE FILIPPI, whose cleverness frequently took such forms as:

If I were fire, I'd burn the world away;
If I were wind, I'd turn my storms thereon;
If I were water, I'd soon let it drown;
If I were God, I'd sink it from the day;
If I were Pope, I'd never feel quite gay
Until there was no peace beneath the sun;
If I were Emperor, what would I have done?
I'd lop men's heads all round in my own way:
If I were death, I'd look my father up;
If I were life, I'd run away from him:
And treat my mother to like calls and runs;
If I were Cecco -- and that's all my hope --
I'd pick the nicest girls to suit my whim,
And other folk should get the ugly ones.⁵

CHIARO DAVANZATI, active from 1250-1280, dominated

the period of transition from Sicilian to Tuscan schools. FOLGORE DI S. GIMIGNANA, who was born in Siena about 1250, wrote a collection of sonnets on the months of the year, describing in them the contemporary life of the nobility. The other prominent Tuscan representative was DINI FRESCOBALDI, who, vigorous and elegant, flourished in the latter years of the thirteenth century. Filippi and Davanzati made use of the Sicilian model; the others accepted Guittone's octet innovation, Frescobaldi going so far as to write experimental sestets in the forms: CDE DCE and CDE EDC.

Alighieri Dante (1265-1321).

Heralded by no "voice in the wilderness", pre-saged by no wave of literary excellence, introduced by no similar mind blazing with kindred fervor, Dante appeared, a slender shaft of individual genius upon the terrain of contemporary mediocrity, the ordered workings of his mind utilizing existing material to transform his life contacts into concepts so immeasurably dear to the universal mind that within the space of forty years he had placed Italy upon a solitary literary pedestal and had earned for himself inclusion in comradeship with the few great literary figures of the world.

Beatrice was the pin-point of flame that fired the inexhaustibly pregnant chambers of his soul; Beatrice, the first of the three famous ladies of sonnet history around whom controversy and speculation have found ample ground for exercise of faculty. This we know: The personality of Beatrice, whether real or imagined, was such as to educe from him a rare, simple, and direct beauty of thought and word. Witness this early sonnet:⁶

My lady carries love within her eyes,
And thus makes gentle whom she gazes on,
Where'er she goes, all men towards her turn;
Whom she salutes, trembles his heart somehow,
And conscious of his own defects, he sighs,
With downcast look, and countenance all wan:
Before her, anger, pride are quickly gone:
O aid me, ladies! to set forth her praise.
Who hears her speak feels something come to bless,
For in his heart, sweet lowly thoughts are bred;
He's blest who first beholds her for awhile:
But how she looks if she but gently smile,
Cannot be kept in mind, still less be said,
New miracle is she of gentleness.

Without her, the "Divina Commedia" would probably never have been written, for it took an event of the magnitude of her death to charge his religious epic with philosophic reality for himself. The final sonnet of his "Vita Nuova" explains the nature of this impetus:⁷

6

Translation by Charles Tomlinson.

7

Translation by Rossetti.

Beyond the sphere that doth all spheres enfold
Passes the sigh that from my heart takes flight,
By weeping Love with new perception dight
Sure way to the ethereal vault to hold;
Then having won unto that height untold,
Of Lady throned in honour hath he sight;
Resplendent so, that by the venturing light
The spirit peregrine doth her behold.
So seen, that when He doth report the same,
I miss his sense, so subtle doth it seem
Unto the grieving heart that makes demand;
Yet know I that my Lady is his theme,
For oft he nameth Beatrice's name,
And then, dear Ladies, well I understand.

We know also that she died a young person in 1290.

Within the bounds of conjecture we may conclude that Beatrice is of certainty a tradition and without reasonable doubt a real person; also, that she is probably not Beatrice Portinari, who became the wife of Simone dei Bardi. Internal evidence supports the belief that she was not baptized Beatrice, was single, and would have married Dante but for her unexpected death. Dante shields her identity successfully and consistently, as so careful a writer could not fail to do; and the eye of public curiosity was completely distracted by the furore of his political troubles.⁸

It is beyond the primary concerns of this study

⁸ See, Beatrice, in "Aids to the Study of Dante", by G. A. Scartazzini, ed., Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1903, p. 324-331.

to recount his unfortunate marriage with Gemma Donati, his embroilment with political factions in 1301 and consequent sentence of exile, his varied residences in Northern Italy, Paris, Ravenna, and Verona, and his completion of the "Divina Commedia" just before his death in 1321. We are concerned with the infrequent impulses he evidenced toward lyricism, with his "Vita Nuova", his "Convita" (preferred by him, but not posterity, to "Vita Nuova"), and his miscellaneous sonetti. Beatrice the lady is mirrored in "Vita Nuova", Beatrice the personification of philosophical love in "Convita", much as Petrarch writes of Laura before and after her similarly untimely death.

Forty sonnets are authentically ascribed to Dante. They are carefully constructed, finished, gracile documents of human experience. In the infrequency and excellence of his sonnets, too, he is like Milton. Thirty-three octets rhyme ABBAABBA, the remaining seven ABABABAB. The sestets range widely in form, embracing the schemes: CDE DCE, CDC DCD, CDE EDC, CDD DCC, CDC CDC, and CDE CDE.

Dante the epic poet has minimized Dante the sonneteer in the past; to-day he shares with Petrarch the high place of Italian sonnetry.

Dante's Contemporaries.

Unlike Petrarch, Dante founded no school. His solitude is unattended by satellite. Yet with his two most notable contemporaries he had cordial relations. CINO DA PISTOIA (1270-1336), whose full name was Guittoncino de' Sinibaldi, may not have been so original as GUIDO CAVALCANTI of the charming sonnet style, but he displayed a higher standard of taste and is important to us for having materially helped perfect the structure of the sonnet. To some extent he pre-figured Petrarch. Cino and Dante together supported the same type of rhyme scheme. Cino's sonnet to Dante upon the occasion of the death of Beatrice is often quoted:⁹

Descend, fair Pity, veiled in mortal weed;
And in thy guise my messengers be dight,
Partakers to appear of virtuous might
That heaven hath for thy attribute decreed.
Yet thou, ere on thy errand these proceed,
If Love consent, I pray, recall and cite
My spirits all astray dispersed in flight,
That so my songs be bold to sue and plead.
Then, hast thou sight of ladies loveliness,
Thither accede, for I would have thee there,
And audience with humility entreat,
And charge my envoys, kneeling at their feet,
Their Lord and his desirings to declare:
Hear them, sweet Ladies, for their humbleness."

Together, the three made Tuscany known as "the Attica of

⁹ Translation by Rossetti.

Italy."

Francis Petrarch (Francesco Petrarco d'Arezzo, 1304-1374).

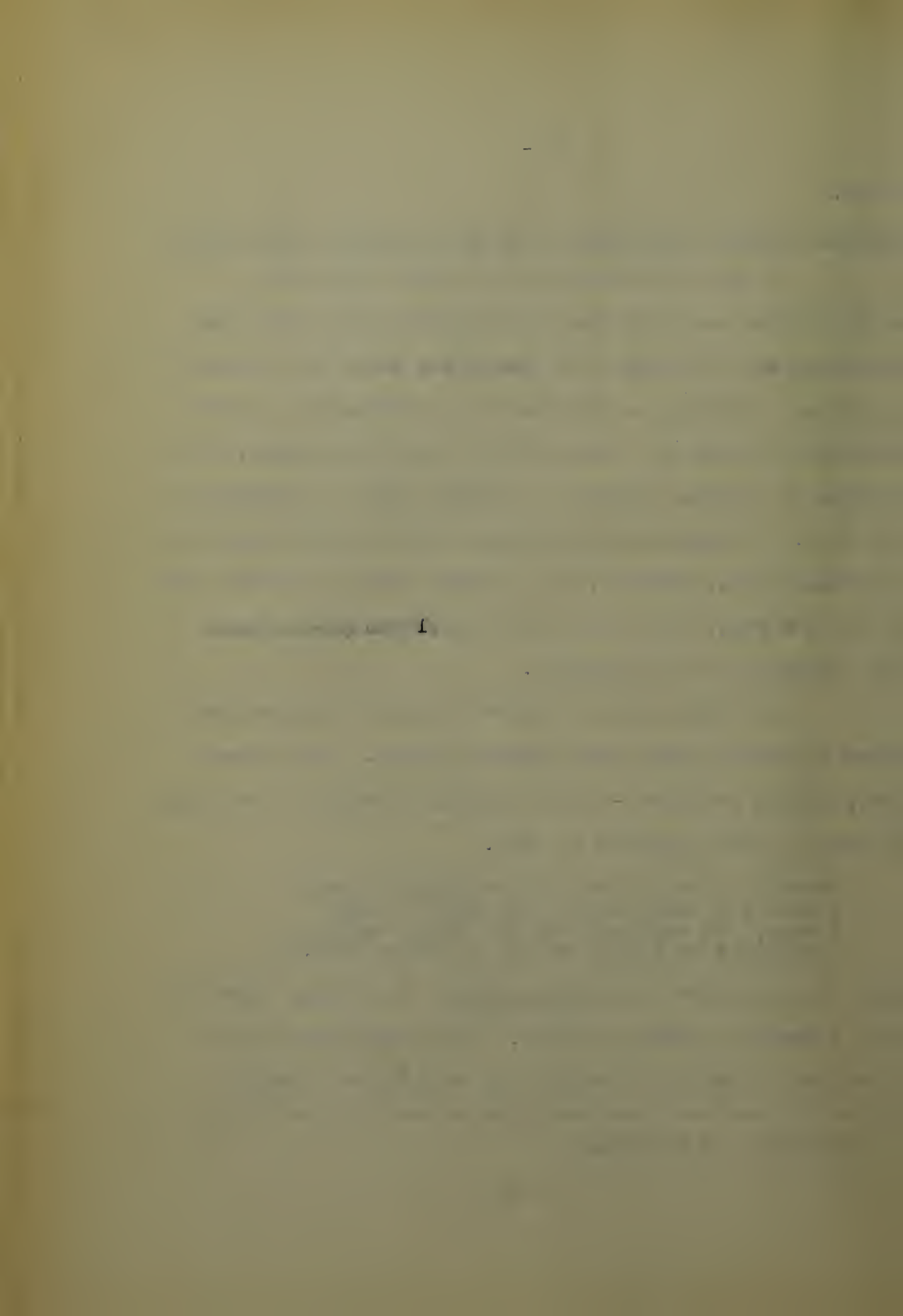
A clear indication of the poor esteem in which Italian was held even one hundred years after the Sicilians had disciplined it and after Dante had raised it to pinnacle height, is afforded us in Petrarch's insistence upon writing for posterity in the Latin tongue, consenting to compose sonnets in Italian only to accommodate his lady. He expected immortality from his Latin epic on the Punic Wars, "Africa", but destiny chose to confer fame in its own way, and in 1341 the laurel was placed upon the forehead of the sonneteer.

He would have us believe that had he never met Laura he should never have written lyrics. It is true that, having seen her -- in a church, he avers -- he began at once to write sonnets of love.

Certain it was to ease my anguished breast,
I know not how, that to the Muse I came;
I wept, but wept not for the poet's prize,¹⁰
Nor deemed my verses worthy of their fame.

They are contained in his Canzoniere, including, "Rima in Vita e Morte de Madonna Laura". The "Vita" has some indications of physical passion and desire; the "Morte"

¹⁰Translation by Tomlinson.



displays a growing, deepening love essentially spiritual, her presence in heaven consoling him for his loss on earth. A sonnet composed while he was living in the Vaucluse Valley illustrates this change:¹¹

O Valley! echoing many a mournful lay,
River! that my sad tears so often swell,
Ye sylvan beasts and birds! Ye too that dwell
In waters which 'tween flowery margins stray!
Ye winds! that my warm sighs meet on their way,
Sweet path! that suits my mournings well,
Hills one beloved! that now of sorrow tell,
Where Love still calls; and I, as wont, obey.
In all these objects well-known forms I see,
While I, alas! how changed; my life once bright,
Is now a source of painful, endless toil.
Here from this path, once trod by her and me,
Her naked spirit took its heavenward flight,
Its lovely tenement to earth a spoil.

Laura died in the Black Plague epidemic of 1348, quickly, sadly, on the anniversary of their meeting day. Within three months his famous patron, Cardinal Colonna, also died. If there is any truth in the theory that eulogizes the sonnet as the fittest form of expression for a particularly wracking personal experience, Petrarch's sonnets at this time should be sublimely human. In fact, they are, as this example indicates:

The lofty Column and the Laurel green,
Whose shade was shelter for my weary thought,
Are broken; mine no longer that which sought
North, south and east and west shall not be seen.

Ravished by Death the treasures twain have been
Whereby I wended with glad courage fraught,
By land or lordship ne'er to be rebought,
Or golden heap or gem of orient sheen.
If this the high arbitrament of Fate,
What else remains for me but visage bent,
And eye embathed and spirit desolate?
O life of man, in prospect excellent!
What scarce slow striving years accumulate
So lightly in a morning to be spent!¹²

Even before tragedy has spoken to him, his verse exhibits
a wholly admirable fineness:

O Love! stand here and on our glory gaze,
Things above nature towering new and fair;
Mark well in her those showers of sweetness rare,
And light that Heaven alone on earth displays.
What art adorns those charms above all praise
In purple, pearls, and gold, not seen elsewhere:
How sweet her feet and glancing eyes appear,
In the dark cloister these loved hills upraise.
Flowers of a thousand tints, the herbage green,
Beneath this ancient sombre oak outspread,
Are emulous to touch her lovely feet;
While in the sky, bright sailing clouds are seen
Kindled by her, as if in joy, they said: --
"Those lustrous eyes make Nature calm and sweet."¹³

"Nothing can approach the 'Canzoniere' as an
epitomized encyclopedia of passion. No poet has so fully
represented the whole world of love in every tone and
variety of play and earnest, delight and pain, enthusiasm
and self-reproach, expostulation, rebellion, submission,
adoration, and friendship, or regret and religious conso-

¹²

Translation by Rossetti.

¹³

Translation by Tomlinson.

lations leading gradually to another sphere of hope and devotion."¹⁴

Questioned in late life concerning the reality and identity of Laura, Petrarch is said to have replied: "What little I am, such as it is, I am through her; and if I have attained to any fame or glory, I had never possessed it if the few grains of virtue which Nature had deposited in my soul had not been cultivated by her with such noble affection. What else did I desire in my youth than to please her, and her alone, who alone had pleased me."¹⁵ To the modern phrasing of the same query, the answer is generally given that Laura was a married woman, the wife of Hugo de Sade, and that she extended to Petrarch during her lifetime the inspiration of her friendship. The character of Petrarch and his poems seems to be inconsistent at many points with this conclusion, however, and it is probably well to let the veil of mystery continue to shroud the person of Laura until the evidence supporting a hypothesis is unquestionably established. Suffice it to say that her heart housed enough of idealism to make possible the most perfect outpouring of amorous emotion

¹⁴

Richard Garnett, A History of Italian Literature, p. 10.

¹⁵

Ibid., p. 11.

the world knows.

While Dante is the greater isolated poetic figure, Petrarch is the greater literary influence. The Cinquecento society set out to imitate the Petrarch of the Canzoniere. The imitation might have been one of form or one of substance. In fact, it became:

(1) Petrarchism, an admirer's unconscious copying of Petrarch or an acknowledged translation of him; (2) Petrarchismo,¹⁶ an insincere literary fashion, concerned with hair like gold, teeth like orient pearls, and eyes outshining suns, a fashion that flourished with all honor and little hindrance up to the very feet of Shakespeare.

Petrarch brought to conclusion the efforts of Guittone, Dante, and Cino to perfect the sonnet structure. His ear was so acutely attuned to sonant rightness, his pen to expressive definition, and his heart to exalted feeling that the result of his many essays was an admittedly supreme sonnet form. The principles governing this form are given at length in the introduction to this study. They are, briefly: The only major break in the

16

See J. M. Berdan, A Definition of Petrarchismo, "Modern Language Association Publications," Cambridge, 1909, V. 24, p. 699-710.

sonnet shall come between the eighth and ninth lines, shall denote a transition from a description or narration to a statement of significance, and shall be bridged rhetorically by some turn of thought or phrase. No rhyme, whether internal or external, shall cloy the ear with sweetness, nor shall any single word be at all unnecessary or indefinite. The rhyme scheme shall be: ABBAABBA CDECDE or ABBAABBA CDCDCD. A rhyming couplet anywhere in the sestet surfeits an ear that remembers the three rhymed couplets in the octet. Out of 317 sonnets Petrarch rhymes 116 ABBA ABBA CDE CDE, 107 ABBA ABBA CDC DCD, and 67 ABBA ABBA CDE DCE. The remainder vary considerably.

Petrarch is significant, then, in the quality of his composition; in the extent and power of his influence; and in his perfection of form. From his standard and from that of Shakespeare the banners of sonnetry float most bravely and proud.

The Cinquecento Revival of Sonnetry.

For a century after the death of Petrarch Italian sonnetry made no progress. Beginning with Ariosto, continuing with Michelangelo and Colonna, and concluding with Tasso, a notable period in Italian poetry developed

during the last of the fifteenth and through the sixteenth century.

LUDOVICO ARIOSTO (1474-1533) was the most Italian of all Italian poets. He is best known for his epic poem, "Orlando Furioso", published first in 1516 and constantly revised until its second publication in 1532. Trying to perfect the old form of epic, he succeeded in plagiarizing and altering classic incidents. His lyrics are fair. In spite of the activity of a difficult and interesting life he left us about eighty sonnets. Nearly all of them conform to Petrarchan type ABBAABBA CDCDCD.

No recital of the growth of Italian literature is complete without appropriate mention of MICHELANGELO (1475-1564), man of controlled force in sculpture, architecture, painting, and literature, and VITTORIA COLLONNA (1490-1547), revered and gifted daughter of the house of Petrarch's benefactor. Michelangelo's sonnets were upon the Petrarchan model, but his strikingly vigorous craftsmanship sometimes obscures the thought it voiced. He was definitely one of the company who hold themselves aloof from people, one like Aeschylus, Dante, and Milton; opposite to the ease of access in the work of Petrarch, Ariosto,

Chaucer, and Spenser. Something of this is apparent in
"To Vittoria Colonna":¹⁷

When once the perfect, godlike art
The form and guise of any man to hold,
Then from mean substance and in simple mould
Doth life the thought at its first birth impart,--
A second birth from marble makes it start
Completed promise of a chisel bold,
Whence, born again, and by no death controlled,
Beauty and force are its immortal part.
So my own model was I born at first,
Myself the pattern, to be born again
Through thy perfecting work, O dame benign,
If thou my fullness fill, and slake my thirst
In pity. Oh, what torture will be mine
If thou my blind and empty thought disdain.

The lady to whom this sonnet is addressed, entered upon a notable career in sonnet composition some years before meeting Michelangelo, upon the occasion of her distinguished and beloved husband's death in battle. Poems firm, eulogistic, and regretful came from her pen. Seven years later she gave up her mind completely to religious influence, its meditative reflection stamping her work with a quiet quality. The last decade of her life was marked by the full, constant, and noble devotion of Michelangelo, himself sixty years of age. The regard was mutual, but no suggestion of scandal can attach itself to their friendship. Throughout her life she was a brilliant figure in Italy and remains so in the pageant of its history: dis-

tinguished in young matronhood by the beauty and force of her married life, in full womanhood admired for her literary ability, and her life long accepted as a superlative example of true nobility. Here are two sonnets by her, one written before, the other after her absorption in religion:¹⁸

TO CHARLES V (reminding him of what he owed to
Pescara's services)

Thy haughty eagle on my glorious sun
Fixing her eyes, high o'er the vulgar crowd
Attained his goal, and doubling glad and proud
Her pinions stroke the fiery sphere had won;
But now her chosen orb its course hath run,
Veiled and obscured for us by densest cloud,
See how her former aim is drooped and bowed;
Her bold flight keeps not as it had begun.
The crowns, the trophies of each emprise,
Dispel the night which dark all else hath made
Borne back with glory in his blazing ray,
That blaze hath broader, since his latest day
He closed in splendor; but it blinds her eyes --
She spreads her wings, but lingers in the shade.

Later,¹⁸

When swells the angry ocean, and surrounds
With force and rage some firmly rooted rock,
If steadfast that shall prove, the boastful shock
Breaks, and the waves fall back within their bounds.
So I, if I behold the flood profound
Of worldly wrath assail me with its mock,
I lift my eyes to heaven, and rout the flock
Of waves on waves the thicker they abound.
And if perchance the blast of passion's voice
Threatens new warfare, speed me to the land,
And with the cord of love, that faith hath twined

To him in whom I trust, my skiff I bind,
Jesus, the living rock; and I rejoice
That when I will, my harbor is at hand.

Of Michelangelo's eighty sonnets, 71 employ the favorite Petrarchan scheme, ABBAABBA CDECDE, 8 the alternative Petrarchan scheme, ABBAABBA CDCDCD, while the remaining one rhymes, ABABABAB CDCDCD. In 110 sonnets ascribed to Vittoria Colonna, 46 rhyme ABBAABBA CDECDE, 18 ABBAABBA CDCDCD, and 46 ABBAABBA CDEDEC.

Abnormally depressing conditions of life so affected TORQUATO TASSO (1544-1595) that he became violently incensed against a patron with the result that he was imprisoned for years as a maniac. Inherently, he was of the stature of genius, his life requiring no apologetic defense, but this was not appreciated by those he loved, save as they robbed him of income and reputation by allowing the surreptitious publishing of unfinished work. He wrote more voluminously than any other Italian poet and maintained a surprisingly high standard of quality. Lyrics, plays, dialogues, and letters came from his pen, a good many of them written in his prison cell. His reputation is solidly founded upon the epic, "Gerusalemme Liberata", but the pastoral play, "Aminta", which he wrote in two days' time, is his best work. Of 213 sonnets using the regular quatrain ABBAABBA, 64

- 28 -

rhyme the tercet as CDECDE, 34 as CDCDCD, and 44 as
CDE DCE.

CHAPTER THREE

LA PLEIADE

Synchronous with Ariosto a group of sonnet writers in France, instigated by MAROT and DE SAINT GELAIS and flowering most brilliantly in RONSARD¹ and his disciple DESPORTES, attempted to lift French poetry above the existing level of ballads and rondeaux particularly by popularizing the difficult, exacting, yet pleasing sonnet. Seriously deforming the Petrarchan structure, they imbibed of the stream of Petrarchismo, that "art of treating cleverly and wittily matters of the heart, of composing love poems without emotion in the soul, of feigning passion for an imaginary mistress, and of singing a fiction of amorous intrigue, whose phases and whose stages are fixed, and, as it were, established by an immovable tradition".² La Pleiade modified this borrowed fashion by inscribing their sonnets to different mistresses, expressing a more normal Platonism, writing somewhat more sensual aspirations, and converting it to elegiac uses.

¹Wyndham, George, Ronsard and La Pleiade.

²Pieri, Petrarch and Ronsard, p. 269.

The probable sources of the Pleiade writers were six: (1) medieval French verse, such as "La Roman de la Rose" and the romance cycle of Charlemagne; (2) the later poetry of Marot, St. Gelais, Hermet, and Scève, neglecting Charles d'Orleans and Villon; (3) Petrarchan Italy, including Petrarch's inferior imitators; (4) the Platonism of the School of Lyons, Italy; (5) Latin authors, especially Virgil; and (6) the Grecian literature of Homer, Pindar, Theocritus, Callimachus, and Lycophron.

Apart from the pause between octet and sestet, which was quite regularly observed, these writers constructed their sonnets usually with a pause at the end of the fourth line and occasionally at the end of the eleventh. The rhyme scheme employed so extensively by the French poets of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, ABBAABBA CCDEDE, was used rather sparingly by La Pleiade. Marot's rhyme plan is overwhelmingly ABBA ABBA CCDEED; Ronsard uses both with nearly equal frequency; and Desportes used the CCDEED scheme almost as exclusively as Marot. French sonneteers eventually became aware of the palling effect of five rhymed couplets confined within a space of fourteen lines, but apparently not of four.

Extravagantly admired throughout France and

England in their day, the poems of La Pleiade have since passed into an unrelieved and undeserved oblivion. To understand them, one must study the poetry of Italy; and to appreciate Elizabethan sonnets, one must know La Pleiade.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE AGE OF ELIZABETH

The state of the English language in 1500 is comparable to that of the Italian in 1200. It had not assumed any reliable, assured form; although having passed through a lusty infancy, its literature was a closed book to the new writer; and its first crude attempts at poetry, like those of the period preceding Dante, culminated in the splendor of Shakespeare and Milton. Its sonnetic poetry then entered upon a barren period, which lasted until the brilliant calm of Wordsworth and the vivid depth of Keats.

Hence, in the field of lyrical poetry England was nearly destitute of heritage. It had not attempted the pentameter line until Chaucer discovered it, presumably in Italy, but possible in France. The decasyllabic blank verse of Surrey's "Aeneid" comes from either Trissino (1515) or Petrarch's blank tercets, not from Chaucer's decasyllabic innovation.¹

¹Crosland, The English Sonnet, p. 22.

The Appearance of Petrarchismo in England.²

The ruddy courts of the novitiate Tudors required a more vigorous poetry than the day afforded. Adaptation of classical poets was found to be impracticable because of the difference in civilizations and in metrical accentuation. Attention naturally turned to modern Italian literature, flourishing at the time in Italy and prevalent and respected in England. The characteristics of the Italian art assumed, then, importance for Englishmen. It was, first, extremely intellectual. A multitude of little courts similar to the French salons developed minds witty rather than profound.³ Second, it was cynically immoral,⁴ due partly to an abortive imita-

²See Berdan, A Definition of Petrarchismo,

- 3 Examples: (a) Indovelli, the art of saying one thing and meaning another.
(b) Cornazzano wrote 100 sonnets in praise of eyes.
(c) The numerous academies were mental gymnasiums playing intellectual games such as intrigued the Intronati of Siena when they published, first, Paradossi, and, second, Confutazione of the paradoxes.

- 4 Examples: (a) The novelle.
(b) The Priapea of France.
(c) The Ragionamenti of Aretino.
(d) The satires of Pietro Nelli.
(e) The Capitoli of Berni.
(f) The lives and crimes of the Borgia, Baglioni, and D'Este.

tion of the Petrarch of the "Vita". Third, a super-structure of Platonic idealism was reared upon the foundation of cynical immorality. Thus, in a century and a half, there came from one original Petrarch "a number of varying forms, all of them equally insincere".⁵ Inevitably, Italian literature was divorced from life. Subject, treatment, and vocabulary became purely conventional matters. This condition left numerous phenomena.⁶

To this highly artificial, sophisticated, grossly imitative confusion England turned for a mould

⁵Berdan, *ibid.*, p. 704-705.

6 Some external indications:

- (a) Cardinal Bembo, the great exemplar of Petrarchismo, wrote idealizing sonnets of Morosina, his mistress and mother of his children.
- (b) Laura Battiferia addresses love sonnets to a woman.
- (c) Lines 12-14 of Sonnet xxii, book I of Ariosto's Opere Minore are typical last lines of a conversational sonnet: "All this is wonderful, truly. Nevertheless, I am not so sure that I do not say emphatically that much more wonderful is my faith."
- (d) Sperone Speroni compiled a dictionary of Petrarchan phrases to assure himself of correctness.
- (e) Tullia d' Aragona, a listed prostitute, wrote the Dialogo della Infinita di Amore, stressing spiritual love.

Internal:

- (a) The poets tell the same story in almost identical terms about ladies who differ only in name.
- (b) The sonnets tend to fall slavishly into types: "galley", cumulative, negative, and standardized comparisons.

in which to pour her poetic ore.

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517-1547).

Sir Thomas Wyatt was a poet, scholar, and courtier. He has been described as one of the most accomplished men of his day, deft in the management of affairs, and of unblemished honor and integrity. His solidity was somewhat in contrast to the more volatile nature of Surrey, who, though equally accomplished and a soldier of renown, twice suffered commitment in Fleet prison, first for "challenging a gentlemen", and later for "roystering and breaking windows in the streets at night". In his thirtieth year Surrey was found guilty of treason and executed.

Both Wyatt and Surrey had residence in Italy and admired Italianate literature. In 1526 Wyatt brought back some court poetry to England, consisting of a sonnet by Samazaro and some translations of Petrarch. Surrey may have conjointly accounted for the introduction of the sonnet into England; at any rate he re-inforced its beginning.

Certain conclusions with regard to the typical forms of Wyatt and Surrey tend to clarify the question

of priority, or, at least, of the models each used. Lathrop states⁷ that "the current view with regard to the sonnet forms of Wyatt and Surrey is that Wyatt in trying to follow the traditions made a blunder which gave Surrey the hint for a happy innovation." This has reference to the alternate plus couplet rhyme of Surrey and is based upon the belief that Wyatt mistook the nature of the sestet sufficiently to make of it a quatrain plus a couplet. Analysis of the accepted manuscripts does not bear out these conclusions. Without reasonable doubt, Wyatt meant to divide the sestet into tercets and usually did so. He did blunder and show lack of sensitivity to rhetorical and rhythmic organization, but did not intentionally diverge from his model. All of his sonnets conform to that Italian type which ends with a final couplet. His octets are uniformly ABBA ABBA. Twenty-six of thirty-one sestets rhyme CDDCEE, implying either CDD CEE or CDDC EE. Thirteen pause before the twelfth line, nine before the thirteenth. Of these nine five also pause at the eleventh line, making three distichs. In the Egerton MS 2711⁸

⁷H. B. Lathrop, The Sonnet Forms of Wyatt and Surrey, in "Modern Philology, V. 2, p. 463.

⁸Title given to manuscript partly in Wyatt's and partly

there are fourteen pauses before line twelve and only one before line thirteen. Consequently, Wyatt's typical sonnet scheme seems to be ABBA ABBA CDD CEE. Of the fourteen sonnets of Surrey universally accepted, two have a unit of twelve lines with a couplet added, six are composed of three four-line stanzas with an added couplet, three form octet and sestet, and the rest are of irregular construction. Both Wyatt and Surrey wrote poems of four or six lines followed by a couplet. Surrey composed a twelve-line strambotto of this type (ABABABABABCC). The sonnet and the difficulties of constructing rhymes in English may easily have influenced Surrey enough to account for differently rhymed quatrains. Hence, the existence of Surrey sonnets with only two rhymes in the first twelve lines and no stanza division would appear to be inconsistent with the notion that Surrey's is a laxer, more fully developed Wyatt sonnet. Surrey's sonnets are more probably a new form derived from the strambotto or suggested by Lentino.

The first sonnet may have been written by either. Leigh Hunt believes that Wyatt wrote it, and

in amenuensis' writing (Nott's Harrington MS I) reprinted by Dr. E. Flugel in "Anglia", vols. XVIII and XIX.

that it is:⁹

Caesar, when that the traitor of Egypt
With th' honorable head did him present,
Covering his gladness, did represent
Plaint with his tears untoward, as it is writ:
And Hannibal, eke, when fortune him (spit)
Clean from his reign, and from all intent,
Laughed to his folks, whom sorrow did torment,
His cruel despite for to disgorge and quit.
So chanceth it oft, that every passion
The mind hideth by color contrary,
With feigned visage, now sad, now merry:
Whereby if I laughed, any time or season,
It is: for because I have nother way
To cloak my care, but under sport and play.

A better example of Wyatt's ability is:

The long love, that in my thought I harbor
And in my heart doth keep his residence,
Into my face presseth with bold pretense,
And therein campeth, spreading his banner.
She that me learneth to love and to suffer,
And wills that my trust, and lustes negligence
Be reined by reason, shame and reverence,
With his hardiness taketh displeasure.
Where with all unto the heart's forest he fleeth,
Leaving his enterprise with pain and cry,
And there him hideth and not appeareth,
What may I do when my master feareth,
But in the field with him to live and die?
For good is the life ending faithfully.

Surrey's sonnets are incomparably better in
a poetic sense but failed to approximate the best sonnet
structure. The following sonnet is noted for its
strambotto-like rhyme:

⁹An Essay on the Sonnet in "The Book of the Sonnet",
p. 65.

DESCRIPTIONS OF SPRING WHEREIN EACH THING
RENEWES SAVE ONLY THE LOVER:

The sweet season that bud and bloom forth brings,
With green hath clad the hill and eke the vale;
The nightingale with feathers new she sings;
The turtle to her mate hath told her tale.
Summer is come, for every spray now springs,
The hart hath hung his old head on the pale;
The buck in brake his winter coat flings;
The fishes fleet with new-repaired scale;
The adder all her sloth away she flings;
The swift swallow pursueth the flies small;
The busy bee her honey now she mings;
Winter is born that was the flowers' bale.
And thus I see, among these pleasant things,
Each care decays, and yet my sorrow springs!

The poems of Wyatt and Surrey were published long after their death in a popular collection called, "Tottel's Miscellany", published in seven editions between 1557 and 1584.

Petrarchismo and the Elizabethan Sonneteer.

The turbulent reign of the luckless Mary, Queen of Scots, retarded the development of the sonnet in England. After the time of Wyatt and Surrey Petrarchismo arrived in France from Italy and was adopted by La Pleiade with the modifications noted in the preceding chapter. That the paucity of sonnet writers in England was not typical of the rest of Europe at the time is indicated by the estimate of Hugues Vagany¹⁰ that 200,000

10

La Sonnet en Italie et en France, II, 9.

sonnets were written in Europe between 1530 and 1565. Beginning, say, in the decade before 1590, Elizabethans turned to the nearest poetic sources, which were the French. The sonnet ideas and language of both French and English, however, conformed to a fashion rather than to objective facts.¹¹ Sidney Lee¹² traces in considerable detail the manifestations of the French and Petrarchan influences in Elizabethan sonnetry. In Spenser's early work we note the presence of "The Visions of Bellay" and "The Visions of Petrarch", which was in reality drawn from Marot's, "Les Visions de Petrarque". For instance, the

¹¹

The greatest single item of proof is to be found in Sidney Lee's Elizabethan Sonnets, which showed that most poets consider golden hair to be the most striking characteristic of their lady:

Sidney, 9: Gold is the covering of that stately place.

Daniel, 6: These amber locks are those same nets.

Barnes, 19: In goldy locks.

Lodge, 17: And gold more pure than gold doth gild thy hair.

Fletcher, 30: Whenas her hair (more worth, more pale, than gold).

Constable, 10: The crest was waves of gold.

Anon., 17: The golden ceiling of thy brow's rich frame.

Spenser, 15: If gold, her locks are finest gold on ground.

Griffin, 32: My lady's hair is threads of beaten gold.

R. L., 3: Her hair exceeds gold forced in smallest wire.

Smith, 9: Remembering her locks, of which the yellow hue Made blush the beauties of the curled wire.

Tofte, I, 12: Then give me of thy hairs, which golden be.

¹²

The Elizabethan Sonnet in "The Cambridge History of English Literature", Cambridge, 1907-1910, v. 3, p. 247-272.

envoy of Marot's "Visions" is:

O chanson mienne, en tes conclusions
Dy hardiment: As six grand visions,
A mon seigneur donnent in doulx desir
De brevement soubx la terre gesir.

while that of Spenser's "Visions" is:

My song thus now in thy Conclusion,
Say boldly that these same six visions
Do yield unto thy lord a sweet request,
Ere it be long within the earth to rest.

Petrarch's envoy differs in text and is superior in
quality. Henry Constable's tenth sonnet in the sixth
decade of "Diana" has a passage,

My God, my God, how much I love my goddess!
Whose virtues rare unto the heavens arise.
My God, My God, how much I love her eyes!
One shining bright, the other full of hardness.

whose unacknowledged source is Desportes' "Diane", I,
26:

Mon Dieu! mon dieu! que j'aime ma deese
Et de son chef les tresors precieux!
Mon dieu! mon dieu! que j'aime ses beaux yeux,
Dont l'un m'est doux, l'autre plein de rudesse.

Daniel's pastoral poem appended to "Delia", "O happy
golden age", is an excellent translation of Tasso's
Aminta, I, 2: "O bella eta de 'l oro". Thomas Lodge
used foreign sources liberally, sonnet 25 being iden-
tified by Lee as a direct translation of Petrarch.
E. Puttenham objected to this furtive borrowing,

stating:¹³ "This man deserves to be endited of pety larceny for pilfering other mens devises...for in deede as I wish every inventour, which is the very Poet, to receave the prayses of his invention, so would I not have a translatour to be ashamed to be acknowen of his translation." Sir John Harrington in "Epigrams", II, 30, says "Of honest theft. To my good friend Master Samuel Daniel":

Then, fellow-Thiefe, let's shake together hands,
Sith both our wares are filcht from forren lands.

Prosser Hall Frye, however, takes exception to Mr. Lee's derogatory conclusions,¹⁴ contending that the English modified the form and character to some extent, that Lodge and Spenser preserved their individuality, and that possibly the Elizabethans were making an essay in ingenuity in connection with which they would have resented charges of prettiness. He speaks of the Elizabethan attitude as being an emphasis on romantic love in a phase of the sociological and individual differentiation between desire, romantic love, and marriage, which in more primitive societies were entirely synonymous.

¹³ Art of English Poesie, 1589.

¹⁴ The Elizabethan Sonnet, in "Literary Reviews and Criticisms", p. 1-18.

Berdan as well defends the value of the

Elizabethan passion for writing sonnets, declaring that they comprise an important stage in our literature.

First, they marked the transition from the rude Stephen Hawes and a powerful doggerel through Skelton to Marlowe, Spenser of the "Faery Queene", and Shakespeare. Second, the notorious difficulty of the form transformed them into an admirable trial period. Third, frigid and artificial though they were themselves, Spenser's "Amoretti" made possible the mastery of the Spenserian stanza. He quotes Alfred Michiel's statement in the introduction to the "Oeuvres de Desportes", 1858, p. xcii, summarizing the contribution of the Pleiade to French literature: "Its true service is the advance which it made in the language and in versification; style became more rich, the phrase more abundant, the period more numerous, the meter more varied."

"Thus", concludes Berdan,¹⁵ "whereas 'prentice pieces of the modern poet never appear, those of the sixteenth century are not only preserved, but a fictitious biographical value is placed upon them. But they were

¹⁵Definition of Petrarchismo, p. 710.

not written to deceive. Watson labels his sources quite carefully. In general, it is assumed that every cultivated reader would recognize the translations from Desportes, Ronsard, or Ariosto. It is the misfortune of that age, and the double misfortune of our present day studies, that we have forgotten the once admired originals. Consequently, we treat these trifles too seriously, deduce from them facts that are untrue, use heavy words, such as plagiarism and theft, when the sixteenth century poet was only doing his best to improve himself and his mother tongue. Petrarchismo was but a literary fashion, and the Elizabethan sonnet cycle but a necessary stage in the progress of the greatness of the Elizabethan age."

Minor Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences.

Following "Tottel's Miscellany" came an incredible output of sonnet sequences, including those of Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare. The dearth of sonnets in the years preceding 1590 is in extreme contrast to the score of years that followed. In 1576 there appeared "The Paradyse of Daynty Devises", containing three quaterzains, one of which approached the sonnet form. Two years later "A Gorgious Gallery of Gallent Inventions"

was published, embracing four quatorzains, none being sonnets. In 1581, "'Ekatompathia,' or Passionate Century of Love" by Thomas Watson offered one hundred eighteen-line paraphrases or translations of Italian and French sonnets, each preceded by an ingenious admission as to its source. As late as 1584 the idea seemed to be current that the term "Sonet" referred to a diminutive poem of any sort; in that year we note the advent of the "Handefull of Pleasant Delites" by CLEMENT ROBINSON, in which lyrics of variously designed stanzas are described as "sundrie new sonets" with "every sonet orderly pointed to its proper tune" and called "a proper sonet", "a sorrowful sonet", etc.

The first correctly fashioned Elizabethan sonnets came in the prolific decade from 1590 to 1600. In 1591 SIR PHILIP SIDNEY'S "Astrophel and Stella" was surreptitiously published. During the following year appeared SAMUEL DANIEL'S "Delia" and HENRY CONSTABLE'S "Diana", both revised and enlarged in 1594 editions. Daniel's proclivity for borrowing conceits has already been remarked. It must not be supposed that his lyrical gifts were of a low order; more than a few later authors of sequences are his inferiors. The sestet of Daniel's

sonnet, "Fair is my love and cruel as she's fair," describes the underlying idea with which the sonnet writers were working:

Chastity and Beauty, which are deadly foes,
Live reconciled friends within her brow;
And had she Pity to conjoin with those,
Then who had heard the complaints I utter now?
For had she not been fair, and thus unkind,
My muse had slept, and none had known my mind.

For an excellent example of his style, consider:

I must not grieve, my love, whose eyes would read
Lines of delight, whereon her youth might smile;
Flowers have time before they come to seed,
And she is young, and now must sport the while.
And sport, sweet maid, in season of these years,
And learn to gather flowers before they wither;
And where the sweetest blossom first appears,
Let love and youth conduct thy pleasures hither.
Lighten forth smiles to clear the clouded air,
And calm the tempests which my sighs do raise:
Pity and smiles do best become the fair;
Pity and smiles must only yield thee praise.
Make me to say when all my griefs are gone,
Happy the heart that sighed for such a one.

Constable was facile in compounding pure rhetoric.

He helped to settle the true form of the distinctively English sonnet. In the following sonnet by Constable note the Shakespearean characteristics of alternate rhyme combined with no pause:

To live in hell, and heaven to behold,
To welcome life, and die a living death,
To sweat with heat, and yet be freezing cold,
To grasp at stars, and lie the earth beneath,
To tread a maze that never shall have end,
To burn in sighs, and starve in daily tears,

To climb a hill, and never to descend,
Giants to kill, and quake at childish fears,
To pine for food, and watch th' Hesperian tree,
To thirst for drink, and nectar still to draw,
To live accursed, whom men hold blest to be,
And weep those wrongs which never creature saw;
If this be love, if love in these be founded,
My heart is love, for these in it are grounded.

1593 saw three collections added to the rapidly rising flood. "Phillis, honoured with Pastoral Sonnets" by THOMAS LODGE and "Licia" by GILES FLETCHER (forty-four years of age at the time), although admired in their day, were not especially notable. BARNABE BARNES' "Divine Centurie of Spiritual Sonnets"¹⁶ suggested a power never achieved. He wrote more, however, than any of his fellows, composing one hundred and five sonnets, twenty-six madrigals, twenty-one elegies, and twenty odes. "Teares of Fancie", a sequence of regular sonnets by THOMAS WATSON, the author of the "Passionate Century", was published posthumously during this year. He still echoed Petrarch and Ronsard, this time omitting acknowledgement of indebtedness. The following sestet marks the highest level of his achievement:

Imperious love upon her eyelids tending,
Playing his wanton sports at every beck,
And into every finest limb descending,
From eyes to lips, from lips to ivory neck:
And every limb supplied and t' every part
Had free access, but durst not touch her heart.

¹⁶ Crosland gives 1595 as the date of publication

Besides the revisions of Daniel's and Constable's cycles there appeared in 1594 an anonymous sequence entitles, "Zepheria", aptly epitomized in the author's own words,

My slubbering pencil casts too gross a matter,
Thy beauty's pure divinity to blaze,

the first edition of MICHAEL DRAYTON'S "Idea", and a group by WILLIAM PERCY called "Sonnets to the fairest Celia". While observing the median pause correctly, he makes use of redundant double rhymes, frequently in closing couplets like:

Since unkind fates permit me not t' enjoy her,
No more (burst eyes!) I mean for to annoy her.

The following year EDMUND SPENSER made an important contribution to sonnet literature in his "Amoretti", and RICHARD BARNEFIELD, a disciple of Michael Drayton, gave us several good sonnets in the sequence, "Cynthia". His technical average may be measured by the following sonnet:

It is reported of fair Thetis' son
Achilles, famous for his chivalry,
His noble mind, and magnanimity,
That when the Trojan wars were new begun,
Whos' ever was deep wounded with his spear,
Could never be recured of his maim,
Nor ever after he made whole again,
Except with that spear's rust he holpen were:

Even so it fareth with my fortune now,
Who being wounded with her piercing eye,
Must either thereby find a remedy,
Or else to be relieved I know not how.
Then if thou hast a mind still to annoy me,
Kill me with kisses, if thou wilt destroy me.

WILLIAM SMITH, sycophantic disciple of Spenser,
grouped fifty-one sonnets in the sequence, "Chloris",
which includes a conventional protest against the con-
ventional sonnet thought of the time:

My love, I cannot thy rare beauties place
Under those forms which many writers use.
Some like to stones compare their mistress' face,
Some in the name of flowers do love abuse;
Some make their love a goldsmith's shop to be,
Where orient pearls and precious stones abound:
In my conceit these far do disagree,
The perfect praise of beauty forth to sound.
O Chloris, thou dost imitate thyself!
Self-imitating, passeth precious stones;
For all the Eastern-India golden pelf,
Thy red and white with purest fair atones,
Matchless for beauty Nature hath thee framed
Only unkind and cruel art thou nam'd.¹⁷

¹⁷In conjunction with this it is interesting to note
Shakespeare's treatment of the same theme:

When in the chronicle of wasted time
I see descriptions of the fairest wights,
And beauty making beautiful old rhyme,
In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights,
Then, in the blazon of sweet beauty's best,
Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,
I see their antique pen would have express'd
Even such a beauty as you master now.
So all their praises are but prophecies
Of this our time, all you prefiguring;
And for they look'd but with divining eyes,
They had not skill enough your worth to sing:

R. L., Gentleman, commonly identified as RICHARD LINCHE, managed to write some of the most workmanlike sonnets of the period in "Diella", but he impresses one as being stronger in diction than in feeling. One of his best sonnets is:

When love had first besieged my heart's strong wall,
Rampir'd and countermur'd with chastity,
And had with ordnance made his tops to fall,
Stooping their glory to his surquedry;
I call'd a parley, and withal did crave
Some composition, or some friendly peace:
To this request he his consent soon gave,
As seeming glad such cruel wars should cease.
I, nought mistrusting, open'd all the gates,
Yea, lodg'd him in the palace of my heart;
When, lo! in dead of night he seeks his mates,
And shows each traitor how to play his part;
With that they fir'd my heart, and thence 'gan fly,
Their names, sweet smiles, fair faces, and piercing eye.

Hailed by Sidney Lanier as a seriously neglected poet,¹⁸ and actually one of the mediocre poets of his time, BARTHOLOMEW GRIFFIN in "Fidessa" leaves us his treatment of certain ideas borrowed from Daniel and Drayton. His best effort is an inferior paraphrase of Daniel's sonnet on sleep:¹⁹

Care charmer's sleep, sweet ease in misery,
The captive's liberty, and his freedom's song,

For we which now behold these present days,
Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to praise.

¹⁸The Sonnet-Makers from Surrey to Shakspeare in "Shakspeare and His Forerunners".

¹⁹Commentators are fond of quoting the four Elizabethan

Balm of the bruised heart, man's chief felicity,
Brother of quiet death, when life is too, too young;
A comedy it is, and now a history,
What is not sleep unto the tired mind?
It easeth him that toils and him that's sorry,
It makes the deaf to hear, to see the blind.
Ungentle sleep, thou helpest all but me,
For, when I sleep, my soul is vexed most:
It is Fidessa that doth master thee,
If she approacheth, alas, thy power is lost!
But here she is -- see, how he runs amain;
I fear at night he will not come again.

SIR FULKE-GREVILLE, first Baron Brooke, and
WILLIAM ALEXANDER, Earl of Sterline, wrote commendable
verses at this time which were not published until several
years later. Fulke-Greville's "Caelica" was presented
in 1633 and Alexander's "Aurora" in 1604. Both produced
better adaptations of the old ideas in good manner. In

sonnets on sleep. Sidney's, "Come, Sleep! O Sleep! the
certain knot of peace"; Daniel's, "Care-charmer Sleep,
son of the sable Night"; Griffin's, "Care charmer's sleep,
sweet ease in misery"; and Fletcher's, "Care-charmer sleep,
thou easer of all woes". Daniel's sonnet follows:

Care-charmer Sleep, son of the sable Night,
Brother to Death, in silent darkness born,
Relieve my anguish and restore the light;
With dark forgetting of my care return,
And let the day be time enough to mourn
The shipwreck of my ill-adventured youth;
Let waking eyes suffice to wail their scorn,
Without the torment of the night's untruth,
Cease, dreams, the images of day-desires,
To model forth the passion of the morrow;
Never let rising sun approve you liars
To add more grief to aggravate my sorrow:
Still let me sleep, embracing clouds in vain,
And never wake to feel the day's disdain.

1610 the "Sonnets" of JOSHUA SYLVESTER were published, containing not a few lines Shakespearean in fineness.

Parts of his best-known sonnet are assuredly sublime:

Were I as base as is the lowly plain,
And you, my Love, as high as heaven above,
Yet should the thoughts of me, your humble swain,
Ascend to heaven in honour of my Love.
Were I as high as heaven above the plain,
And you, my Love, as humble and as low
As are the deepest bottoms of the main,
Where'er you were, with you my love should go.
Were you the earth, dear Love, and I the skies,
My love should shine on you like to the sun,
And look upon you with ten thousand eyes
Till heaven wax blind, and till the earth were done.
Where'er I am, below, or else above you
Where'er you are, my heart shall truly love you.

This sonnet is characterized fundamentally by admirable construction and is typical of the Elizabethans' growing comprehension of suitable sonnet form.

There remains one poet unconsidered. WILLIAM DRUMMOND of Hawthornden was born, lived, and died on his paternal estate, seven miles from Edinburgh. His entire life was saddened by the death of his young bride, and his sorrow found outlet in a number of sonnets notable for their grave beauty. One of the few Elizabethans to use the sonnet for unconventional subjects, his sonnets descriptive of natural beauties or philosophically contemplative are still heartily admired. The following suggests the average of his work:

Of this fair volume which we World do name
If we the sheets and leaves could turn with care,
Of Him who it corrects, and did it frame,
We clear might read the art and wisdom rare:
Find out his power which wildest powers doth tame,
His providence extending everywhere,
His justice which proud rebels doth not spare,
In every page, no period of the same.
But silly we, like foolish children, rest
Well pleased with colour'd vellum, leaves of gold,
Fair dangling ribbands, leaving what is best,
On the great Writer's sense ne'er taking hold;
Or if by chance we stay our minds on aught,
It is some picture on the margin wrought.

Major Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences: Sir Philip Sidney
(1554-1586).

The first sonnet sequence of the Elizabethan age is in some respects the finest. It was arranged and polished with so much care, was so clearly a model of what a sonnet sequence should be, that we have in its excellence one of the main reasons for the ensuing obsession for sonnet writing. Its single flaw was one of rhyme scheme; Sidney made use of the pattern favored by the French Pleiade, ABBAABBA CCDEED. Otherwise, critics agree that the series is admirable in the fine details of avoidance of jar, too close repetition of sets of rhymes, and variety of mood as well as with respect to the larger matters that account for the absolute absence of halting, faulty lines, and, consequently of slipshod sonnets.

The man characterized by such painstaking crafts-

manship is remembered as courtier, soldier, scholar, and, especially, as a sonnet poet, particularly as the author of the sequence "Astrophel and Stella". Unquestioned sincerity pervades the poems of this group; they are the expressive silhouette of an inherently artistic personality against a background of hopeless love, the reliquaries of the desire of a flesh and blood poet for a flesh and blood woman. Because they are steeped in the essence of life, because they breathe life's breath, they have lasted with Shakespeare.

We know that Stella was Penelope Rich, betrothed to Sidney in their youth, but married to a Mr. Rich for financial reasons. What Sidney thought of the situation is definitely shown in the sonnets which play upon the name. The poems are no mere transcript of personal sensation, but are the record of a true poet touched by lyric emotion. The first edition, published surreptitiously five years after his death, discloses his gradual acceptance of the impossibility of requitement. The first fully authorized version, appearing in 1598, added sonnets no. 109 110. No. 109 berates with greater than Shakespearean fierceness his former complacency with love's joys and dis-

comforts,²⁰ and no. 110 reveals resolute reaction to a deeper than casual hurt, agreeing in mood with 109.²¹ They are included among the few great sonnets in the English language. Sidney might have bridged this difference more gradually had he supervised the publications of his works. It is far from remotely possible that he never would have consented to the printing of poems so

²⁰Thou blind man's mark, thou fool's self-chosen snare,
Fond fancy's scum, and dregs of scattered thoughts:
Band of all evils, cradle of causeless care;
Thou web of will, whose end is never wrought:
Desire! Desire! I have too dearly bought,
With price of mangled mind, thy worthless ware;
Too long, too long, asleep thou hast me brought,
Who should my mind to higher things prepare.
But yet in vain thou hast my ruin sought;
In vain thou mad'st me to vain things aspire;
In vain thou kindlest all thy smoky fire;
For Virtue hath this better lesson taught, --
Within myself to seek my only hire,
Desiring nought but how to kill Desire.

²¹Leave me, O Love, which reachest but to dust;
And thou, my mind, aspire to higher things;
Grow rich in that which never taketh rust;
Whatever fades, but fading pleasure brings.
Draw in thy beams, and humble all thy might
To that sweet yoke where lasting freedoms be;
Which breaks the clouds, and opens forth the light,
That doth both shine, and give us sight to see.
O take fast hold; let that light be my guide
In this small course which birth draws out to death,
And think how ill becometh him to slide,
Who seeketh heaven, and comes of heavenly breath.
Then farewell, world; thy uttermost I see:
Eternal Love, maintain thy life in me!

revelatory of personal anxieties.

Some of his main claims to competence are constituted of certain more formal sonnets outside the "Astrophel and Stella" group. "My true love hath a heart and I have his"²² is an exceptional instance, while "Who doth desire that chaste his wife should be"²³ is, in the opinion of Crosland, a comparatively unhonored work worthy of the Shakespearean series itself, possessing "quite apart

²²My true love hath my heart and I have his,
By just exchange one for the other given:
I hold his dear, and mine he cannot miss;
There never was a better bargain driven:
His heart in me keeps him and me in one,
My heart in him his thought and senses guides:
He loves my heart, for once it was his own,
I cherish his, because in me it hides.
His heart his wound received from my sight;
My heart was wounded from his wounded heart,
For as from me, on him his hurt did light,
So still me thought in me his heart did smart:
Both equal hurt, in this change sought our bliss,
My true love hath my heart, and I have his.

²³Who doth desire that chaste his wife should be
First be he true, for truth doth truth deserve:
Then such be he, as she his worth may see,
And one man still credit with her preserve.
Not toying kind, nor causelessly unkind,
Not stirring thoughts, nor yet denying right,
Not spying faults, nor in plain errors blind;
Never hard hand, nor ever reins too light.
As far from want, as far from vain expense
(The one doth force, the other doth entice)
Allow good company, but keep from thence
All filthy mouths that glory in their vice:
This done thou hast no more, but leave the rest
To virtue, fortune, time, and woman's breast.

from its subject the balance and poesie and restraint of the perfect piece of art".²⁴

Major Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences: Edmund Spenser
(1552-1599).

Spenser's position in English literature is not dependent upon his work as a sonneteer; rather does he afford us an example of the unusual disciplinary value of writing sonnets; and while his poems, individually considered, are quite regularly clean, leaping arcs into elemental beauty, considered as models of the sonnet form, they have serious defects.

Like Sidney and Shakespeare, having worked out his own idea of proper rhyme scheme, he adhered to it. The result, ABAB BCBC CDCD EE, is disappointing to the ear. Although some are stronger, frequently the final couplet is awkward doggerel like:

More sweet than nectar, or Ambrosial meat
Seem'd every bit which thenceforth I did eat

and

Only behold her rare perfection
And bless your future's fair election,

There is a diffuseness of expression in his eighty-eight sonnets inconsistent with literary art; one suspects that twenty would tell the story. The story itself is far from

original, being descriptions of the physical excellencies, moral virtues, and "tygreish" proclivities of the "countrie lasse" whom he married when he was forty-two.

On the other hand, as sonnets they are not without marked values. No question as to the essentially poetic nature of their author can be at all maintained. This is surely obvious in:

Happy ye leaves! when as those lily hands,
Which hold my life in their dead-doing might,
Shall handle you, and hold in love's soft bands,
Like captive's trembling at the victor's sight.
And happy lines! on which with starry light,
Those lamping eyes will deign sometime to look,
And read with sorrows of my dying sprite,
Written with tears in heart's close-bleeding book.
And happy rhymes! bath'd in the sacred brook,
Of Helicon, whence she derived is;
When ye behold that Angel's blessed book
My soul's long-lacked food, my heaven's bliss;
Leaves, lines, and rhymes, seek her to please alone,
Whom if ye please, I care for other none!

He also composed some sonnets in blank verse, said to be translations from the Dutch, which are important historically and formally and which contain many sonorous lines like:

A voice that said, Behold the bright abode
Of God and men. For he shall be their God,
And all their tears he shall wipe clear away.

His best sonnets are those beginning: "Oft when my spirit doth spread her bolder wings", "In that proud port, which her so goodly graceth", "Men call you

fair, and you do credit it", "Thrice happy she! that is so well assured", "Sweet is the Rose, but grows upon a brier", and "Most glorious Lord of life, that on this day". These are from the sequence he published under the title, "Amoretti".

Major Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences: Michael Drayton (1563-1631).

Speculation as to the level of Drayton's greatness swings between the views that his high passages are occasional and accidental and that he shares with Shakespeare the paramount position among Elizabethan sonneteers. There seems to be no disagreement with the conclusion that several of his sonnets are superb and that one passage in particular is without superior, is, indeed, "lyricism, ecstasy, pure soul, pure poetry -- writ down forever, as fine as Shakespeare can be at his finest in the Plays or the best Sonnets, as fine and as perfect as any four lines that can be quoted out of any poet".²⁵ That passage is lines 9-12 of the sonnet:

Since there's no help, come, let us kiss and part;
May, I have done: You get no more of me,
And I am glad, yea glad with all my heart,
That thus so cleanly, I myself can free,

²⁵Crosland, The English Sonnet, p. 160.

Shake hands forever, cancel all our Vows,
And when we meet at any time again,
Be it not seen in either of our brows,
That we one jot of former love retain.
Now at the last gasp of Love's latest breath,
When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies,
When Faith is kneeling by his bed of Death,
And Innocence is closing up his eyes,
Now, if thou would'st, when all have given him o'er,
From Death to Life, thou might'st him yet recover.

It is reasonable to suppose that a man capable of so immense an emotional conception and of sounding it, not in Shakespeare's imperial style, but like a man with a heart in his bosom, does not stumble by any sort of accident upon such inspired expression. In fact, he has written four other sonnets of almost equal greatness,²⁶ twenty more of indubitably high quality, and hardly one in the more than one hundred he left lacks some strain of beauty like:

He framed him wings with feathers of his thought

or

Thy bow half-broke is piec'd with old desire,
Her bow is beauty with a thousand strings.

Drayton is significant in that he forsook the "sugar'd" and wailing speech of most of his contem-

²⁶ (a) In one whole world is but one Phoenix found.
(b) Sweet secrecie, what tongue can tell thy worth?
(c) If he from heaven that filched the living fire.
(d) My thoughts bred up with Eagle-birds of Jove.

poraries for a native rugged force,²⁷ his robustness of
wooing producing sonnets like, "Since to obtain thee nothing
will me stead" and

Three sorts of serpents do resemble thee;
That dangerous eye-killing cocatrice,
Th' enchanting syren, which doth so entice,
The weeping crocodile; these vile, pernicious three.
The basilisk his nature takes from thee,
Who for my life in secret wait doth lie,
And to my heart send'st poison from thine eye:
Thus do I feel the pain, the cause ye cannot see.
Fair-maid no more, but mer-maid be thy name,
Who with thy sweet alluring harmony
Hast played the thief, and stol'n my heart from me,
And, like a tyrant, mak'st my grief my shame.
The crocodile, who when thou hast slain,
Lament'st my death with tears of thy disdain.

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This man possessed a wealth of inward strength. As a direct revelation of himself, nothing can excel his preface to the second part of "Polyolbion":
"TO ANY THAT WILL READ IT. When I first undertook this Poem I was by some virtuous friends persuaded, that I should receive much comfort and encouragement therein, and thor these reasons; First, ... a new, clear way; ... then that it retained all the Delicacies, Delights and Rarities of this renowned Isle: ... And further that there is scarcely any of the nobility or gentry of this land, but ... is ... interested. But it hath fallen out otherwise; for instead of that comfort, ... I have met with barbarous ignorance, and base detraction; nay, some of the Stationers, that had the selling of the First Part of this Poem, because it went not so fast away in the sale, as some of their beastly and abominable trash, (a shame both to our language and nation) have either despitefully left out, or at least carelessly, neglected the Epistles to the Readers. ... and some of our outlandish, unnatural English, (I know not how otherwise to express them) stick not to say that there is nothing in this Island worth studying for, and take great pride to be ignorant on anything thereof; for

His deftness with a more playful sonnet is well illustrated in:

As Love and I, late harbour'd in one inn,
With proverbs thus each other entertain,
In love there is not lack, thus I begin;
Fair words make fools, replieth he again;
That spares to speak, doth spare to speed, quoth I.
As well, saith he, too forward as too slow,
Fortune assists the boldest, I reply;
A hasty man, quoth he, ne'er wanted woe.
Labor is light, where love, quoth I, doth pay;
Saith he, light burthen's heavy, if far borne;
Quoth I, the main lost, cast the by away;
You have spun a fair thread, he replies in scorn.
And having thus awhile each other thwarted,
Fools as we met, so fools again we parted.

Such skill reminds one of needlepoint design. His interesting prescription called, "A Remedy for Love," has no antecedent source that can be found.

These considerations make it seem very likely that this warm-tempered gentleman worked hard to divert his naturally strong impulses into forms of permanent value. His high success is due, not to chance, but to unrelenting, painstaking labor.

these, since they delight in their folly, I wish it may be hereditary from them to their posterity, that their children may be begged for fools to the fifth generation, until it may be beyond the memory of man to know that there was ever other of their families: neither can this deter me from going on ... to perform as much as I have promised in my First Song. ... And as for those Cattle whereof I spake before, Odi profanum vulgus, et arceo, of which I account them, be they never so great, and so I leave them. To my friends, and the lovers of my labors, I wish all happiness."

Major Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences: William Shakespeare
(1564-1616)

In Shakespeare, achievement in the English sonnet reaches its pinnacle. Aspersed by critics until more recent years because of the form's alleged "Procrustean" disadvantages,²⁸ his sonnets have not commonly been appraised for what they actually are--broad understanding made beautiful in stately and moving verse. Nor is this an evaluation made by some Shakespearean hero-worshipper; it is the judgment which inevitably emerges from a contemplative perusal of the sonnets themselves, individually or collectively considered.

The freeing of Elizabethan sonnetry from the tradition of Petrarchismo, effectively begun by Drummond and Drayton, is completed by Shakespeare. In eleven years of composition he uses but one rhyme scheme: ABABCD CD EFEFGG, finding in it a perfect alliance between the character of sonnet content and the rhyming limitations of the English language. His lady is personable, having none of

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Drummond of Hawthornden quotes Ben Jonson as saying in "Conversations", p. 4: "He cursed Petrarch for redacting verses to sonnets, which he said were like that tyrant's bed (Procrustes), where some who were too short were racked, others too long cut short."

the virtues of his predecessors' loves save a beauty outshone by her charm. His terms are drawn from whatever source will serve him with words most suitable in sound and meaning. His perceptions are those of a man of strong spirit, extensive in sympathy and discernment, perspicacious, able to weigh value against value with a philosopher's disdain for appearance. His sonnets seem each to capture in a specific problem the measured, steady stride of his thought, each to be a section having no perceptible starting effort. One or two of his sonnets will make these things clearer than can any exposition of mine:

Sonnet 146

Poor soul, the center of my sinful earth,
Fool'd by those rebel powers that thee array,
Why dost thou pine within, and suffer dearth,
Painting thy outward walls so costly gay?
Why so large cost, having so short a lease,
Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?
Small worms, inheritors of this excess,
Eat up thy charge? Is this thy body's end?
Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,
And let that pine to aggravate thy store;
Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;
Within be fed, without be rich no more:
So shalt thou feed on death, that feeds on men,
And, death once dead, there's no more dying then.

Sonnet 116

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love,
Which alters when it alteration finds;
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark,

That looks on tempests, and is never shaken;
It is the star of every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me prov'd,
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

This group of one hundred and fifty-four sonnets is not without defects. Nos. 145, 153, and 154 are notably inferior in general quality. In his type of structure the final couplet is especially important, and one out of seven is marred by the weak rhyme sound i, as in me, be, see, and thee. In addition, a few of the poems give some evidence of redundant repetition in order to fill space, such as, let us say, lines 9-12 in sonnet 71:

No longer mourn for me when I am dead,
Then you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell:
Nay, if you read this line, remember not
The hand that writ it; for I love you so,
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
If thinking on me then should make you woe.
O if (I say) you look upon this verse,
When I perhaps compounded am with clay,
Do not so much as my poor name rehearse;
But let your love even with my life decay:
Lest the wise world should look into your moan,
And mock you with me after I am gone.

Yet when we have noted these shortcomings we have compassed them, and there is left that breadth, depth, strength, versatility, and virtuosity that accounts for the accolades of superlatives universally tendered his work.

John Donne (1573-1631)

A brilliant young man at the time when the Elizabethans were most active, John Donne personified the vigor and energy suggested by some of Drayton's work, writing strangely metred lyrics, odes, and elegies in which he left no note unsounded in the gamut of personal love. He served on the Spanish Main under the Queen's Lord Essex. When his patrimony had been entirely expended, he married Anne More, niece of Thomas Egerton, and spent fifteen years attended by poverty. This wearying period refined his earlier amorous absorption; his poems begin to speak of religious doctrine. As Anglican minister (he took the orders in 1614 and later became famous as Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral) he brought to congregations the same rigorous condensation of epigrammatic ideas that had characterized his verse. His only volume of sonnets entitled "Holy Sonnets", was published in 1618, a year after the death of his wife.

His lines are conspicuous for oddity of metre, nonchalant rhyme, recondite, intense thought, and harsh-sounding consonants. His epigrams are clever and witty. Writing in his youth of a physical love distinct in character from the mannered love of his elders, and, later,

about the passion of religious experience and truth, he stood at odds with the literary standards of his time. Forgotten by his countrymen within a hundred years in spite of Cowper's praise, he was rediscovered by Browning, similarly recondite and intense, and Sir Edmund Gosse, his biographer, in the nineteenth century. Lately he has received fresh notice.²⁹

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Miss Millay's love of love has an acknowledged inspiration in Donne's lyrics and sonnets. Her twelfth sonnet in "Fatal Interview" ("Olympian gods, mark now my bedside lamp") is of the same artistic cloth as "Annunciation" (quoted on page 78 of this thesis) in his "Corona", although her method of approach and type of thought more closely parallel that of some of his early poems. Elegy XVI, "On His Mistress", of which lines 1-7 and 47 to end are quoted here, is an excellent example of this correspondence and of the individualities of his style:

By our first strange and fatal interview,
By all desires which thereof did ensue,
By our long starving hopes, by that remorse
Which my words' masculine persuasive force
Begot in thee, and by the memory
Of hurts, which spies and rivals threatened me,
I calmly beg:

When I am gone, dream me some happiness,
No let thy looks our long hid love confess,
Nor praise, nor dispraise me, nor bless nor curse
Openly love's force, nor in bed fright thy Nurse
With midnights' startings, crying out, Oh, oh,
Nurse, Oh, my love is slain, I saw him go
O'r the white Alps alone; I saw him I,
Assail'd, fight, taken, stabb'd, bleed, fall, and die.
Augur me better chance, except dread Jove
Think it enough for me to have had thy love.

All this would serve to indicate that he patronized an eccentric sonnet scheme, if any. The "Holy Sonnets" are a collection of twenty-eight poems. Seven comprise the sequence, "Corona", in which an endless chain of stanzas is fashioned structurally by the identity of each last line with the first line of the sonnet ensuing and chronologically by the subjects, "Introduction", "Annunciation", "Nativity", "Temple", "Crucifying", "Resurrection", and "Ascension". Twenty-six sonnets are made to rhyme ABBAABBA in the octet; fifteen of which follow this with CDCD EE, eleven with CDDC EE. Fifty out of 367 lines, one in seven, end in the vowel sound i. The metre is irregular, yet not ineloquent. The pause between octet and sestet is well placed in every sonnet.

The best jewel in the "Corona" is the second:

Salvation to all that will is nigh;
That All, which always is All every where,
Which cannot sin, and yet all sins must bear,
Which cannot die, yet cannot choose but die,
Lo, faithful Virgin, yields himself to lie
In prison, in thy womb; and though he there
Can take no sin, nor thou give, yet he'll wear
Taken from thence, flesh, which death's force may try.
Ere by the spheres time was created, thou
Wast in his mind, who is thy Son, and Brother;
Whom thou conceiv'st, conceived; yea thou art now
Thy Maker's maker, and thy Father's mother;
Thou'hast light in dark; and shut'st in little room,
Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb.

while for brilliance expressing humility, take the last in the spiritual series:

Oh, to vex me, contraries meet in one:
Inconstancy unnaturally hath begot
A constant habit; that when I would not
I change in vows, and in devotion.
As humorous in my contrition
As my profane Love, and as soon forgot:
As ridlingly distemper'd, cold and hot,
As praying, as mute; as infinite, as none.
I durst not view heaven yesterday; and to-day
In prayers, and flattering speeches I court God:
To-morrow I quake with true fear of his rod.
So my devout fits come and go away
Like a fantastic Ague: save that here
Those are my best days, when I shake with fear.

John Milton (1608-1674)

If Shakespeare be termed the emperor of English literature, then Milton is the high priest, in his maturity never allowing his robe of high dignity to fall. Fitting himself with Puritanical firmness for the fulfilment of a high destiny clear even to the youth who wrote:

Such where the deep transported mind may soar
Above the wheeling poles, and at Heaven's door
Look in, and see each blissful Deity
How he before the thunderous throne doth lie,
Listening to what unshorn Apollo sings³⁰

he found occasion to create only twenty-three sonnets, of which five are in Italian. The qualities which color his longer works distinguish these.

30
On a Vacation Exercise in College.

The superbness of his sonnets is noticeably affected, however slightly, by certain defects. Eight of the twenty-three have improper breaks between octet and sestet;³¹ he makes free use of the hackneyed sounds i and e and ai for rhymes;³² approximate rhymes are frequent and not at all impressive;³³ sonnets 13 and 20 exemplify double rhymes;³⁴ sonnet 23 has only one vowel change in the rhyme;³⁵ and several employ rhymed couplets improperly in the sestet.³⁶

31

Sonnets 1, 11, 12, 18, 19, 17, 22, and three of the Italian sonnets.

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Sonnet 1, octet: e as in spray; sestet: e and ai.
10, octet: treasury, fee, victory, liberty.
12, octet: liberty, me, fee, progeny; sestet: free, Liberty, see.
7, sestet: high, eye.
18, sestet: way, sway, they.
21, sestet: way, day.

33

Sonnet 7, octet: shew'th, endu'th, truth, youth.
11, octet: Tetrachordon, pored on, word on, Gordon.
(Written as a humorous satire.)
14, God, load.
16, victories, rise.
23, save, have.

34

Sonnet 13, sestet: Purgatory, story.
20, octet: mire, fire, reinspire, attire.

35

Octet: saint, grave, gave, faint, taint, save, have, restraint; sestet: mind, sight, shined, delight, inclined, night.

36

Sonnets 3, 4, 5, 15, 16, 20.

Only two of his sonnets may be judged perfect in construction; they are no. 8, "When the Assault was Intended to the City", which has been often cited, and no. 9:

To A Virtuous Young Lady.

Lady! that in the prime of earliest youth
Wisely hast shunned the broad way and the green,
And with those few art eminently seen,
That labour up the Hill of Heavenly Truth,
The better part with Mary and with Ruth
Chosen thou hast, and they that overween,
And at thy growing virtues fret their spleen,
No anger find in thee, but pity and ruth.
Thy care is fixed, and zealously attends
To fill thy odorous Lamp with deeds of light,
And Hope that reaps not shame; therefore be sure,
Thou, when the Bridegroom with his feastful friends
Passes to bliss at the mid hour of night,
Hast gained thy entrance, Virgin wise and pure.

Three of those having some technical faults are obviously of poetic fineness, namely: no. 17, "To Sir Henry Vane the Younger," no. 19, "On His Blindness", and no. 18:

On the Late Massacre in Piedmont.

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered Saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;
Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshiped stocks and stones,
Forget not: in thy book record their groans
Who were thy sheep, and in their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piedmontese, that rolled
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
To heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow
O'er all the fields, where still doth sway
The triple tyrant; that from these may grow
A hundredfold, who, having learnt thy way,
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

While Milton grew up among the Elizabethans, his productive adulthood is largely influenced by the religious reformists of Cromwell's time. The seriousness of his purpose did not completely overcome the impulses of his eventful youth until after "Lycidas", in which one can discern traces of both Miltons. His alienation from the Elizabethan culture freed him from the inspiration of the amorous sonnet sequence. In consequence, his sonnets were written as occasion challenged and permitted, and all of them, with the possible exception of "On His Deceased Wife", were concerned with events and prominent people. He gave great impetus to the type of dedicatory sonnet which eulogizes its subject's achievements.

While I have made free with criticism of certain characteristics of the Miltonian sonnet, it is in no sense a condemnation. The Elizabethan sonnet is a distinct type of poem form in itself and the curtains of time which enshrouded the age were drawn over the sonnet development as well with such completeness that it may suffer from imitation but never from duplication. Milton was thoroughly aware of sound values. He knew that Shakespeare had built upon a chosen plan a structure so formidable as to

prove detrimental to the reputation of any ambitious poet who might later essay it. He himself determined to accept and limit his own outpourings to the Petrarchan system, graciously conceding to the memory of Shakespeare Shakespeare's form. Consequently, he confined his sonorous music to the alternative type of rhyme, which was to find general favor until the sonneteers of the present day lowered all horizons.

Milton bequeathed to us seventh-heaven standards respecting sonnet subject-matter and manner of treatment. He struck for us the die of the modern sonnet.

CHAPTER FIVE

Wordsworth, Keats, the Victorians, and the Beginnings in America

The Decline of Sonnet Activity between Milton and Wordsworth (1674-1798)

Following Milton there came a singular silence in the sonnet mode, reminiscent, it may be, of the period in Italian literary history when Dante and Petrarch seemed to exhaust the capacity of the sonnet province, leaving the world to wait until the years had accumulated unvoiced sonnetal beauty beyond the point of repression. Dryden dominated the period from 1660-1702; Classicism, represented by Pope, flourished thereafter until 1740 and survived for thirty years more; at which time the Romanticists ushered in the singing of Cowper, Burns, and Blake, then gained power, first, from Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, and Scott and, in the second generation, from Byron, Shelley, and Keats, and persisted in influence throughout the Victorian period.

From Milton, indeed, until the period marked by modern divergences (1875-1914), there arise only two

poets¹ notable as sonneteers: William Wordsworth and John Keats.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

T. W. H. Crosland concludes a castigating treatment of Wordsworth's sonnet laxities with the following appraisal:² "Emotionally Wordsworth lifted the sonnet to heights never before attained, and sounded with it depths never before plumbed. He made it an affair of the intellect and the brooding spirit as well as of the fancy and the passions. In his hand the thing became an ecstasy as well as a trumpet, a vision and a tenderness as well as an austerity. And as it is by these qualities of rapture, vision, and tenderness that English poetry exceeds and outstrips and outsoars all other poetry, we may say that it was Wordsworth who gave to the modern English sonnet special qualities that make it English. The modern English sonnet as we conceive of

¹ Deserving critical mention, however, are Thomas Gray's (1716-1771) "On the Death of his Friend West", which employs classical language much as Milton's "Lycidas", Anna Seward's (1747-1809) interesting and regular sonnet, "Rising Early to Read on a Winter's Morning", and William Lyle Bowles' (1762-1850) popular but structurally defective sonnets, especially "To Time" and "Hope".

² The English Sonnet, p. 261-262.

it and hope for it, began with him, and in its glories, achieved and to come, he must always have part."

Wordsworth wrote more than four hundred sonnets, of which a half score are perfections, two score are passable, and three hundred and fifty are permanently disappointing. His amazing variety of sonnet types and multitudinous slip-shod lines give evidence of his belief that the nature of poetry requires the preservation of spontaneity in composition. He himself says as much in his adjuration to a methodical poet in the sonnet beginning, "A Poet! -- He hath put his heart to school";

Thy Art be nature: the live current quaff
And let the groveller sip his stagnant pool.

Even so exhaustless a genius as Wordsworth could not write at a uniformly high standard and at the same time preserve the balance of his soul's tranquillity from labor.³ The very state of perfection contained in his best

3

James Kenneth Stephens in somewhat poor taste takes Wordsworth to task with a parodic sonnet of his own:

Two voices are there: one is of the deep;
It learns the storm-cloud's thunderous melody,
Now roars, now murmurs with the changing sea,
Now birdlike pipes, now closes soft in sleep:
And one is of an old half-witted sheep
Which bleats articulate monotony,

sonnets has encouraged admirers to imitate his most lamentable faults along with his most laudable virtues. The force of such imitation was felt in English literature, especially in the sonnet, for a hundred years after the model was framed.

Compare the beginnings of such sonnets as, "Jones, when from Calais southward you and I" and "There, said a stripling, pointing with meet pride" with the beginnings of two of his masterpieces:

Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
The City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at its own sweet will:
Dear God, the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

And indicates that two and one are three,
That grass is green, lakes damp, and mountains steep:
And, Wordsworth, both are thine.

What Matthew Arnold thought of Wordsworth is stated in "Memorial Verses", lines 45-50:

He found us when the age had bound
Our souls in its benumbing round,
He spoke, and loosed our hearts in tears.
He laid us as we lay at birth
On the cool flowery lap of earth,
Smiles broke from us, and we had ease.

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free;
 The holy time is quiet as a Nun
 Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
 Is sinking down in his tranquillity;
 The gentleness of heaven is on the Sea;
 Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
 And doth with his eternal motion make
 A sound like thunder -- everlastingly.
 Dear Child! dear Girl! that walkest with me here,
 If thou appear untouched by solemn thought,
 Thy nature is not therefore less divine:
 Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year,
 And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
 God being with thee when we know it not.

One might conceivably be construed to err in terming them master-pieces, which implies that they are of that rare elevation which desires absolute finesse of execution as well as breadth of conception. In every major requirement these sonnets satisfy that desire. It is unfortunate, however, a perceptible linking to poetic commonness, that he did not see fit to avoid abused rhymes.⁴ His decision in this regard may be due to his

4

Seventeen of his better sonnets (Nuns fret not; Not Love; O gentle Sleep; Praised be the Art; Even; I am not one; Yet life, you say; Wings have we; Nor can I not believe; Earth has not anything to show more fair; Where holy ground; Milton!; It is a beauteous evening; Though Joy attend; A winged goddess; Surprised by Joy; Methought I saw;) contain numerous examples of hackneyed rhymes, such as: (1) in i: free and me (three times); thee, sea, and eternity (all twice); be, liberty, activity, glee, peaceably, majesty, etc.; (2) in e: way (twice), stay, day, bay, lay, etc.; (3) in ai: I (twice) and hereby; in disyllabics: hour (three times), dower, bower, power, flower, endeavor, forever, melancholy, slowly, lowly, fire, desire, even, and given.

desultory conception of sonnet value. It is certain that the effects of this decision may be traced in the work of every major poet succeeding him.

His other superb sonnets are: To Milton; To Toussaint L'Ouverture; After Thought; "When I have born in memory what has tamed"; "O Friend, I know not which way I must look"; "Fair Star of Evening, Splendour of the West"; and

The world is too much with us; late or soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.

John Keats (1795-1821)

Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne:
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold;
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific -- and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise --
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

It will be readily observed that the rhyme scheme of this poem is without flaw, ABBAABBA CDCDCD being one of the three ideal forms, and that little fault can be found with the naturalness, exactness, or variety of the rhyming sounds. The first eight lines are subordinate in

significance, precedent in position, and distinctly separate in context from the last six, which in their turn are the climactic succession of their antecedents in poetic compass, extension of imagery, and definition of personal relation. Transition between the two sections is accomplished most gracefully and easily. The experience described has been shown unquestionably valid for presentation through the sonnet medium. The final line is a triumph of poetic selection. One can go far in the argument that this sonnet is the finest that exists in our language. Yet it was written by a boy less than twenty-two years of age and published in his first book of verse.⁵

In its own day unfortunately, the critic Leigh Hunt, idol of the boy John Keats, failed utterly to recognize the fulfilment of promise manifested in "On Looking into Chapman's Homer", and, as a result, must be held largely responsible for the young poet's disinterest in the sonnet as a natural medium of tremendous potentiality for most genuine poetic utterance.⁶ In spite of himself and his tutors, however, at the moments when he felt most deeply

⁵ "Poems", 1817.

⁶ Leigh Hunt is shown to average advantage in "Abou Ben Adhem", but was addicted most to jingling rhymes.

the tragedy of his imminent death he cried out with the full voice of his genius, and his cries fell into rhythmic place with the disparaged sonnet form. "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles"⁷, "To Homer", "To Ailsa Rock", and "Bright Star, would I were steadfast as thou art",⁸ are jewelled crystallizations of those deepmoving, furrowing forces.

⁷
My spirit is too weak -- mortality
Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep,
And each imagin'd pinnacle and steep
Of godlike hardship, tells me I must die
Like a sick Eagle looking at the sky.
Yet 'tis a gentle luxury to weep
That I have not the cloudy winds to keep
Fresh for the opening of the morning's eye.
Such dim-conceived glories of the brain
Bring round the heart an undescribable feud;
So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,
That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude
Wasting of old Time -- with a billowy main --
A sun -- a shadow of a magnitude.

⁸
Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art --
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors --
No -- yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel forever its soft fall and swell,
Awake forever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever -- or else swoon to death.

Factors of Influence Affecting the Victorian Sonnet.

The sonnets of the Victorian period were affected by four cogent influences.

In 1848 seven English artists bound themselves into a group self-styled "Pre-Raphaelites": Dante Gabriel Rossetti, his brother William Michael, John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt, Frederick George Stephens, Charles Collinson, all painters, and Thomas Woolner, sculptor. Dante Rossetti became the ruling force in this movement, whose singular work began with the appearance of Hunt's "Eve of St. Agnes". In time, Millais left the ranks, but the loss was subsequently balanced by the enlistment of John Ruskin and Sir Edward Burne-Jones. The term, "Pre-Raphaelite", was consciously chosen to indicate an adherence to the ideals which inspired Italian painters before the time of Raphael, ideals of simplicity, sincerity, and religious mysticism which Rossetti and his fellows made manifest especially in determination of subject, spiritual texture of paintings, and thoroughness of execution to the minutest detail. In idea it signified a revolt against the pseudo-classic, unoriginal paintings of their day, a reaching after the beauty that simplicity always seems to possess. The painter-poet Rossetti attracted, also, a Pre-Raphaelite

group of poets (consisting formally of Rossetti, Meredith, Morris, Swinburne and a number of lesser poets, and enjoying community of aesthetic aim with Arnold, Tennyson, and Browning), whose lyrics constituted a recurrence to the romanticism of Byron, Keats, and Shelley. With this difference, however: a poem to them was a collection of related images, each colorful, picturesque, visually beautiful, and real, so much so as to deserve the generally employed appellation, "painters' poetry". Practically all of Rossetti's sonnets are illustrative of this concept and attitude, as are many of Meredith's and some of Swinburne's. The realness of Rossetti's influence may be seen by the facts that Meredith and Rossetti, living at 16 Cheyne Walk, extended their household to receive Swinburne for the remainder of his life when that young man showed some symptomatic evidence of epilepsy. Together with Watts-Dunton, the three formed an influential, intimate group. Thus, the best intentions in the world resulted in an onset of sonnets that were stiff, mechanical, and over-attentive to exactitude of detail, while engaging the mind with vivid processions of variegated pictures. The two most representative examples of this tapestry effect are Rossetti's "Blessed Damozel" and "My

Sister's Sleep".

The second force was the Miltonic example of rigidly high subject and tone. Victorian sonneteers refused to pioneer beyond the topic limits of love, religion, and dedication within which the sonnet had been confined by tradition.

Contemporary critics, including William Sharp, Theodore Watts-Dunton, Edmund Gosse, and J. A. Symonds, thoroughly disseminated the idea that a sonnet should gain and subside in power like a wave rushing up a beach and retreating to its element.⁹ The peculiar requirements of method and idea which the sonnet exacts of its devotees demand a maintenance of high poetic level from beginning to end, and a pointing of its idea in the sestet to personal or universal significance in a dramatic development all its own. The "wave" theory made no provision for the latter at all and, as for the former, subsidence of mood became in fact subsidence of standard.

When one reviews, then, the Pre-Raphaelite straining toward simple beauty, the austere Miltonic tradition, and the perverted idea of sonnet structure and function popularized by the reigning critics, and joins with them

⁹

See p. 103-104.

the fourth influence of fecund Wordsworthian exemplifications of sonnet carelessnesses, one approaches an impressive explanation as to why so little of the voluminous sonnet writing of these years is worthy of inclusion in the succession of noble sonnets.

With respect to the sonnet, the Victorian period will probably be considered more and more a transition period expressing the old concepts, especially that of romantic love, with the technique emphasized by the Pre-Raphaelites and failing to write many great sonnets because of the example of imperfect authority, yet opening the way for the frankness, the daring, and the individuality of the modern period.

Victorian Sonnet Writers: Elizabeth Barrett Browning
(1806-1861).

Now that the storms of adulatory approval showered upon the sonnets of Mrs. Browning have had time to settle into resolvable currents, we see that the intimately revealing sonnets centred upon the famous love of Robert and Elizabeth, although wholly selfless in their emotional revelation, are rather too sentimental, too feminine (one is tempted to say), to withstand the multi-phased assault of centuries. Number 43 of "Sonnets to the Portuguese"

is ordinarily quoted as her best:

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the end of Being and Ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise;
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith;
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints, -- I love thee with the breadth,
Smiles, tears, of all life! -- and if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

Structurally, she employs an excellent rhyme scheme, effective and smooth: ABBAABBACDCDCD. With respect to sestet break, however, she has been less definite and less uniform. Sixteen of the "Sonnets from the Portuguese" have no perceptible break, while of the remaining twenty-eight only four fall into octets and sestets of eight and six lines respectively, sixteen have sestets between five and seven lines in length, while the break in eight falls between the last half of the eighth line and the beginning of the thirteenth. When they occur, the break in thought has not the clear incision of "Dear Child, that walkest with me here"; the sestet thought difference is less sharply defined as the final sonnet of the sequence shows:

Beloved, thou hast brought me many flowers
Plucked in the garden, all the summer through
And winter, and it seemed as if they grew
In this close room, nor missed the sun and showers.
So, in the like name of that love of ours,
Take back these thoughts which here unfolded too,
And which on warm and cold days I withdrew
From my heart's ground. Indeed, those beds and bowers
Be overgrown with bitter weeds and rue,
And with thy weeding; yet here's eglantine,
Here's ivy! -- take them, as I used to do
Thy flowers, and keep them where they shall not pine.
Instruct thine eyes to keep their colours true,
And tell thy soul, their roots are left in mine.

Her rhymes disclose a rather free use of i sounds, in which she makes use of thee eight times and me six together with too many rhymes on -ly, such as utterly and hastily. King, fling, conquering, and thing in sonnet 16 are disagreeable to the ear, as are the diphthongs nigher, higher, showers, flowers, ours, etc., occurring in sonnets 22, 40, and 44, and the double rhymes insphere thee, hear thee, and near thee in sonnet 29.

In common with Rossetti she tends to regard the sonnet as an undivided lyric dealing solely with one subject, but, with more than Rossetti's regard for Petrarchan structure, defends, like him, the thesis that love emotions are inherently dignified enough to deserve expression in the lofty vehicle of Milton's making.

Victorian Sonnet Writers: Charles Tennyson Turner (1808 1875).

Father of a sonnet characterized by a personal

responsiveness that amounted to prettiness, Tennyson Turner is entitled to historic consideration only because he captured his own generation, occupying with Mrs. Browning and Rossetti the seat of honor in the Victorian sonnet world. There is no question that he was a truly sensitive poet; nor can we question the ultimate validity of a verdict finding his work hardly robust enough for the rough handling of posterity. Notice how the titles of the poems as well as the extracts given below reflect the temper of his approach to aesthetic experience:

(1) The Vacant Cage

His poor head buried near his bursting heart,
Which beat within a puffed and troubled frame;
But he has gone at last, and played his part.

(2) The Lachrymatory

Two most of all, my dreaming eyes did see;
The young Marcellus, young, but great and good,
And Tully's daughter, mourned so tenderly.

(3) The Forest Glade

As one dark morn I trod a forest glade,
A sunbeam entered at the further end,
And ran to meet me through the yielding shade.

(4) Letty's Globe

She patted all the world; old empires peeped
Between her baby fingers; her soft hand
Was welcome at all frontiers. How she leaped,
And laughed and prattled in her world-wide bliss.

(5) Her First-Born

She tossed him fondly with an upward eye,
He seemed as buoyant as a summer spray
That dances with a blossom on its breast.

Victorian Sonnet Writers: Matthew Arnold (1822-1888).

Here our attention is turned upon an artist capable of being inscribed upon the scroll of great sonneteers, who, nevertheless, displays unpardonable carelessness of execution whenever he essays that form. Here is the influence of Wordsworth's impromptu methods exhibited most banally. He could use the sonnet line to such moving purpose as:

It irked him to be here, he could not rest.
He loved each simple joy the country yields,
He loved his mates; but yet he could not keep,
For that a shadow lowered on the fields,
Here with the shepherds and the silly sheep,
Some life of man unblest
He knew, which made him droop, and filled his head.
He went; his piping took a troubled sound
Of storms that rage outside our happy ground;
He could not wait their passing, he is dead!

So, some tempestuous morn in early June,
When the year's primal burst of bloom is o'er,
Before the roses and the longest day --
When garden-walks, and all the grassy floor,
With blossoms, red and white, of fallen May,
And chestnut flowers are strewn --
So have I heard the cuckoo's parting cry,
From the wet field, through the vext garden trees,
Come with the volleying rain and tossing breeze:
The bloom is gone, and with the bloom go I.¹⁰

¹⁰"Thyrsis", stanzas 6, 7.

and still descend to the artificialities of:

Affections, Instincts, Principles, and Powers,
Impulse and Reason, Freedom and Control --
So men, unravelling God's harmonious whole,
Rend in a thousand shreds this life of ours.
Vain labour! Deep and broad, where none may see;
Spring the foundations of the shadowy throne
Where man's one Nature, queen-like, sits alone,
Centred in a majestic unity,
And rays her powers, like sister islands, seen
Linking their coral arms under the sea;
Of clustered peaks, with plunging gulfs between
Spanned by aerial arches, all of gold;
Where'er the chariot wheels of Life are rolled
In cloudy circles to eternity.

It is hard to observe such potential majesty dispersed in unsightly dribblets of inconsideration. An examination of his first lines reveals the same unpolished workmanship; two, chosen at random are: "Who prop, thou ask'st, in these bad days, my mind?" and "Artist! whose hand, with horror winged, hath torn".

The fact that Arnold is equally famous in philosophy and poetry is reflected by the subjects he undertakes to treat in sonnet form. Most of them are doctrinal, exhortative, or philosophical, as certain titles suggest: "To a Friend", "Human Limits", "To a Republican Friend, 1848", "East London", "West London", "Worldly Peace", "Religious Isolation", "The Better Part", "The Good Shepherd with the Kid", "The Divinity", "Immortality", and "Mona's Last Prayer".

Had Arnold regarded the sonnet as worth his serious attention, our literature in this field would have been worthily enriched.

Victorian Sonnet Writers: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882)

Leading with William Morris the artistic group self-styled "Pre-Raphaelites", this Italian-blooded and Italian-born painter and poet occupies a unique place in the history of English art. His southern nature was not quite agreeable to the general movement away from Romanticism, yet his training and associations produced in him a love of concise, image-packed speech. The one decreed sonnet themes of love; the other unconventional language. True to the Wordsworthian example, his sonnet structures abound in faults, but they offer little compensation in the way of lasting poetry.

The blemishes are native to the method he employed. Any thought to be developed in a sonnet was first stated in prose, after which recourse to dictionaries of rhyme and synonym would make possible the cutting of its poetic dress. Reading his lines is a process of continual stumbling over concept or sound, leaving one with the impression that they are condensed prose. The majority of his quatorzains are not properly sonnets at all, being

wholly descriptive or narrative. His rhymes are rarely good, are frequently in fact, as execrable as kiss and suitservice. His imagery--bold, varied, and vivid as it is--oftentimes appears to be labored, as when he writes of "moon-clouds", "deep-bowered dove", "brink of ban", or "ozier-odoured stream".

One would expect so excellent a translator and sincere a lover of Dante and Petrarch to make use of the happy Italian sonnet structure, but Rossetti allows himself to corrupt the ideal. His principal scheme is ABBA ABBA in the octet with CDD CEE or CCD EED in the sestet. Octet and sestet are separate in punctuation only.

"The House of Life", a sonnet-sequence describing the love setting, emotion, or implication of related yet distinct love moments, constitutes his chief claim to sonnet fame. His best sonnet in this volume is entitled, "Silent Noon":

Your hands lie open in the long fresh grass,
The finger-points look through the rosy blooms:
Your eyes smile peace. The pasture gleams and glooms
Neath billowing skies that scatter and amass.
All round our nest, far as the eye can pass,
Are golden kingcup-fields with silver edge
Where the cow-parsley skirts the hawthorn-hedge.
Tis visible silence, still as the hour-glass.
Deep in the sun-searched growths the dragon-fly
Hangs like a blue thread loosened from the sky:--
So this winged hour is dropt to us from above,
Oh! clasp we to our hearts, for deathless dower,
This close-companioned inarticulate hour
When two-fold silence was the song of love.

I quote it as much for illustration of rueful tendencies as for its better parts. In the rhyme we have: grass, amass, pass, glass including the differing rhymes blooms, glooms, edge, and hedge; two rhymed couplets dishonor the sestet, presenting the decrepit fly, sky rhyme and the disyllabic dower, hour. The pause distinguishing octet from sestet sense comes between lines eleven and twelve. This poem is much smoother than many of its companions, yet what is the meaning of line two? is "gleams and glooms" defensible? or "amass"? is not "Cow-parsley skirts" alien to poetry? Considered individually, a number of the phrases have beauty; such phrases as: "Your hands lie open in the long fresh grass", "Your eyes smile peace", "visible silence, still as the hour-glass", "like a blue thread loosened from the sky", and "close-companioned inarticulate hour". Considered collectively, the work lavished upon their individual saliency has detracted from the beauty of the whole.

Rossetti's incomprehension of the function of both octet and sestet arises from the prominence visited upon the "wave" theory of sonnet structure by contemporary critics. Each sonnet was supposed to advance like a wave upon a sea beach, crash to a climax, and retreat

in subsiding rivulets to the main.¹¹ This misconception of function in both octet and sestet takes away from the poem the effect traditionally associated with a sonnet. In "Silent Noon" Rossetti would contend that lines 7-10 constitute a climax accompanied by a rising action and by a recession to the conclusion.

The artist seems to escape his self-imposed limitations at times. In lines 12-14 of the sestet of "Love-Sight",

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Theodore Watts-Dunton probably gave the greatest impetus to the "wave" theory. His Britannica article on the sonnet defines it at some length, and he states the central ideal pithily in the sestet to "The Sonnet's Voice (A Metrical Lesson by the Seashore)":

The sonnet is a wave of melody;
From heaving waters of the impassioned soul
A billow of tidal music one and whole
Flows in the "octave"; then returning free
Its ebbing surges in the "sestet" roll
Back to the deeps of Life's tumultuous sea.

John Addington Symonds' sestet in "The Sonnet is a World" also describes it:

Our Sonnet's world hath two fixed hemispheres:
This, where the sun with fierce strength masculine
Pours his keen rays and bids the noon-day shine;
That, where the moon and the stars, concordant powers,
Shed milder rays, and daylight disappears
In low melodious music of still hours.

The conception violates the principle set forth on page (ix) of the Introduction to this paper.

O love, my love! if I no more should see
Thyself, nor on the earth the shadow of thee,
Nor image of thine eyes in any spring,--
How then should sound upon life's darkening slope
The ground-whirl of the perished leaves of Hope
The wind of Death's imperishable wing?

in the corresponding

lines of "A Day of Love",

As here between our kisses we sit thus
Speaking of things remembered, and so sit
Speechless while things forgotten call to us.

in the 11th and 12th lines of "Love-Sweetness",

In confident heart's still fervour; the swift beat
And soft subsidence of the spirit's wing.

and in the sestet of "Body's Beauty",

The rose and poppy are her flowers; for where
Is he not found, O Lilith, whom shed scent
And soft-shed kisses and soft sleep shall snare?¹²
Lo! as that youth's eyes burned at thine, so went
Thy spell through him, and left his straight neck bent
And round his heart one strangling golden hair.

he manages to sustain the level rather longer than usual.

All praise is due to Rossetti for his effective-
ness in creating interest in the sonnet, for his naïve
nobility, for his concentrated labors in the cause of art,
yet, judged solely as a writer of sonnets, he must assume

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This deliberate generosity with sh and s clearly defeats
its too ostensible purpose. Substitute anything that
makes sense for "shed"--say, "whom soft scent And
cloistered kisses and warm sleep shall snare?"; is it
not improved?

the lesser vesture of mechanician.

Victorian Sonnet Writers: George Meredith (1828-1909)

Meredith must be granted a place in the field of the sonnet comparable to that which he enjoys as a novelist. For one so prominent in prose Meredith wrote a great deal of poetry. In one sonnet, at least, he achieves greatness:

LUCIFER IN STARLIGHT

On a starred night Prince Lucifer uprose.
Tired of his dark dominion swung the fiend
Above the rolling ball in cloud part screened,
Where sinners hugged their spectre of repose.
Poor prey to his hot fit of pride were those.
And now upon his western wing he leaned,
Now his huge bulk o'er Africa careened,
Now the black planet shadowed arctic snow
Soaring through wider zones that pricked his stars
With memory of the old revolt from Awe,
He reached the middle height, and at the stars,
Which are the brain of heaven, he looked, and sank.
Around the ancient track marched, rank on rank,
The army of unalterable law.

The single defect in structure is the rhymed couplet in the sestet. Otherwise, it is impressive in its vivid, yet controlled imagery, its forceful wording, and its perfection of rhyme sounds, its prophet tone, and its superb concluding sentence.

Soon after attaining his majority Meredith married a widow nine years his senior and entered upon a decade of life tinged with the unpleasantness of

incompatibility. "Modern Love", a sequence of sixteen-line sonnets published in 1862, virtually tells the story. In 1858 his wife went to the continent with a lover, the following year returned to England alone and ill, and died during the fall of 1861 deserted by friends. Busy with a volume in preparation, Meredith heard the news indirectly. He contracted a more satisfactory marriage three years later and soon, save for an interval as correspondent at the Austro-Italian war, settled down to an agreeable life as literary adviser to his publishers, Chapman and Hall of London.

His first volume of verse, "Poems", appeared in 1851 and won no considerable following although receiving favorable comments from Kingsley and Tennyson. His next venture, "Modern Love and Poems of the English Roadside, with Poems and Ballads", is distinctly his best poetic work, having an intensity and subtlety unequalled during the century.¹³ An intellectual embodiment of nat-

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Almost any one of the fifty "mock-sonnets" in the sequence would prove exemplary of this. Let IV suggest his treatment:

All other joys of life he strove to warm,
And magnify, and catch them to his lip;
But they had suffered shipwreck with the ship,
And gazed upon him sallow from the storm.

ural realism, his chief poetic characteristic, is prominent in "Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth", published in 1883. His first noteworthy sonnets in the traditional form, including "Lucifer in Starlight", were printed at this time. Four years later came "Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life", followed in a year by "A Reading of Earth" and, in 1892, by "The Empty Purse". The remaining years of his long life produced in verse "Odes" (1898), "A Reading of Life" (1901), and "Last Poems", posthumously published in 1910.

Meredith was an admirer of Browning, an intimate of Rossetti, and a friend of Swinburne. His poetry has the vigor and unorthodox language of Browning and the melodic lilt of Swinburne.

Many of his sonnets are attempted word pictures of revered masters in literature written in the best tradi-

Or if Delusion came, 'twas but to show
The coming minute mock the one that went.
Cold as a mountain in its star-pitched tent,
Stood high Philosophy, less friend than foe:
Whom self-caged Passion, from its prison-bars,
Is always watching with a wondering hate.
Not till the fire is dying in the grate,
Look we for any kinship with the stars.
Oh, wisdom never comes when it is gold,
And the great price we pay for it full worth:
We have it only when we are half earth.
Little avails that coinage to the old!

tion and, therefore, failing to anticipate the modern technique in the sonnet of portraiture. The virility of his style is well illustrated in them, however, as an instance of which consider:

R. B.
12 December, 1889

Now dumb is he who waked the world to speak,
And voiceless hangs the world beside his bier;
Our words are sobs, our cry of praise a tear;
We are the smitten mortals, we the weak.
We see a spirit on earth's loftiest peak
Shine and wing hence the way he makes more clear;
See a great tree of life, that never here
Dropped leaf for aught that rage of storms might wreak.
Such ending is not death, such living shows
What wide illumination brightness sheds
From one big heart to conquer man's old foes,
The coward and the tyrant and the force
Of all these weedy monsters' rising heads,
When song is talk from springs of turbid source.

The man showed an amazing restlessness with established forms, which is reflected in his impatience with any one sestet rhyme arrangement. Of forty-one fourteen-line sonnets he wrote, seven have hybrid or Shakespearean octets and thirty-four Petrarchan. Of the sestets in the later case, five, (written in late life), rhyme CDECDE, four CDECED, and four CDEDCE.

Victorian Sonnet Writers: Christina Georgina Rossetti
(1830-1894)

Sister to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, personal re-

cluse, dogmatic devotee of orthodox religious belief, Christina Rossetti left a large body of poetry betokening a spirit of reverie, sweetness balanced with gravity and austerity with aesthetic sensitiveness. Her work appears against a dark personal background despite the literary success she enjoyed. Her father's death in 1854 meant a period of poverty to her; she felt compelled to reject two estimable suitors because of church differences; and later her life was blemished by a critical illness of three years' duration.

She began early to write lyrics for magazines and published "Goblin Market", her first and best volume of verse in 1862. Her subsequent volumes were: "Prince's Progress" (1886); "Sing-Song", a book for children (1872), "A Pageant", a religious disquisition betraying slackening lyrical power (1881); and "New Poems", a posthumous publication (1896).

Some of her best work appears in sonnet form. Often, however, her sonnets lose force because of experiments with rhyme sequence,¹⁴ prevalence of the least de-

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Such experiments as: ABBAABBA with CDDECD, CDDCDC, CDEEDC, CDEDCE, and CDCDDC: ABBABAAB with CDCEED: and ABBACCAC with DEFEDF.

sirable rhymes,¹⁵ and generally weak effectiveness possibly due to too early an approval of effort. Yet there are numerous indications that her seclusion and religious fixation made possible a delicacy of expression reminiscent of a water-color's pale tone, although suggesting also deeply-rooted melancholy. "The Thread of Life" is representative:

The irresponsive silence of the land,
The irresponsive sounding of the sea,
Speak both one message of sense to me:--
Aloof, aloof, we stand aloof, so stand
Thou too aloof, bound with the flawless band
Of inner solitude; we bind not thee;
But who from thy self-chain shall set thee free?
What heart shall touch thy heart? what hand thy hand?--
And I am sometimes proud and sometimes meek,
And sometimes I remember days of old
When fellowship seemed not so far to seek
And all the world and I seemed much less cold,
And at the rainbow's feet lay surely gold,
And hope felt strong and life itself not weak.

Victorian Sonnet Writers: Algernon Charles Swinburne
(1837-1909)

One of the greatest lyrical figures of his day,
Swinburne is remembered as a sonnet poet largely because

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A selection of eight of her better sonnets ("Remember" and "After Death" from The Unseen World sequence, "Abnegation" and "Trust" from Monna Innominata, sonnets 6 and 9 from Later Life, "Oh ye, all ye that walk" from An Echo from Willowood, and "The Thread of Life") discloses that of the 112 lines, thirteen end in i and six in e and that the words stand, hand, sea, and be are used each three times.

he made it a matter of dedication. His sonnet form complies with the loose requirements current at that time, but the music of his famed genius for singing lines graces them, too. The sonnet by which he is most frequently represented is:

ON THE DEATHS OF THOMAS CARLYLE AND GEORGE ELIOT

Two souls diverse out of our human sight
Pass, followed one with love and each with wonder:
The stormy sophist with his mouth of thunder,
Clothed with loud words and mantled in the might
Of darkness and magnificence of night;
And one whose eye could smite the night in sunder,
Searching if light or no light were thereunder,
And found in love of loving-kindness light.
Duty divine and Thought with eyes of fire
Still following righteousness with deep desire
Shone sole and stern before her and above,
Sure stars and sole to steer by; but more sweet
Shone lower the loveliest lamp for earthly feet,
The light of little children and their love.

Victorian Sonnet Writers: David Gray (1838-1861)

This Scotch young man, victim of tuberculosis in his twenty-fifty year, was wholly absorbed in his belief that he was destined for paramount literary creation and was only partially resigned to the destructive imminence of death by reflection upon other poets who had died similarly young and by the hope of existence after death. His last ten months of life were spent tranquilly at his home near Edinburgh. During that time he contrived to write "In the Shadows", a sequence of

thirty sonnets utilizing varying rhyme schemes and displaying marked difference in quality. They possess, however, a truly engaging quality which with maturing skill might have made a more universal appeal. Considerations of form, matter, and poetic style are apt to approve most certainly the twenty-first sonnet of the group, which may also be said to reveal most poignantly the reality of his tragedy:

Sometimes, when sunshine and blue sky prevail --
When spent winds sleep, and from the budding larch,
Small birds, with incomplete, vague sweetness, hail
The unconfirmed, yet quickening life of March, --
Then say I to myself, half-eased of care,
Toying with hope as with a maiden's token, --
"This glorious, invisible fresh air
Will clear my blood until the disease be broken."
But slowly from the wild and infinite west,
Upsails a cloud, full-charged with bitter sleet.
The omen gives my spirit deep unrest;
I fling aside the hope, as indiscreet, --
A false enchantment, treacherous and fair, --
And sink into my habit of despair.

Victorian Sonnet Writers: John Addington Symonds
(1840-1893)

Among the several volumes of poems and essays which spaced Symonds' more famous biographical and historical studies, appear two volumes of sonnets: "Animi Figura" and "Vagabunduli Libellus". A keen and emotionally rich man, his interest in artistic Italy, bearing fruit in his seven-volume "Renaissance in Italy", resulted

also in some sonnet activity of note; and, although he does not take rank with the acknowledged great poets in this form and his sonnets exemplify many of the careless traits common to the time, he has unquestionably realized a singular degree of lyric feeling and conceptual dignity. In structure, he regularly observes the break between octet and sestet in idea as well as deed and his rhymes are of many kinds: sometimes he chooses to include the rhymes of the alternate Shakespearean plan, at other times his octet follows the Italian style, ABBAABBA, to which he adds, besides the regular sestets CDCDCD and CDECDE, BCBBC, CDDCEE, and CDDECE. Two sonnets of his merit quotation:

Give me thyself! It were as well to cry:
Give me the splendor of this night of June!
Give me yon star upon the swart lagoon
Trembling in unapproached serenity
Our gondola, that four swift oarsmen ply,
Shoots from the darkening Lido's sandy dune,
Splits with her steel the mirrors of the moon,
Shivers the star-beams that before us fly,
Give me thyself! This prayer is even a knell,
Warning me back to mine own impotence.
Self give not self; and souls sequestered dwell
In the dark fortalice of thought and sense,
Where, though life's prisoners call from cell to cell,
Each pines alone and may not issue thence.

THE FALL OF A SOUL

I sat unsphering Plato ere I slept:
The through my dream the choir of gods was borne,
Swift as the wind and splendid as the morn,
Fronting the night of stars; behind them swept

Tempestuous darkness o'er the drear descent,
Wherein I saw a crowd of charioteers
Urging their giddy steeds with cries and cheers,
To join the choir that aye before them went:
But one there who fell with broken car
And horses swooning down the gulf of gloom;
Heavenward his eyes, though prescient of their doom,
Reflected glory like a failing star,
While with wild hair blown back and listless hands
Ruining he sank toward undiscovered lands.

The Sonnet in America from its Inception until 1875

The sonnet began in America with its first major poet, WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT (1794-1878), who was familiar with the form as a translator of poems in the romance languages and as a near contemporary of the Elizabethans. Four of the eight sonnets to his credit extol natural beauty,¹⁴ one, "William Tell", is eulogistic; one, "Sonnet from the Portuguese of Samedo", is a translation; another is philosophical;¹⁵ and his first is on "Consumption". His sonnets have little in common with traditional structure, due, probably, to his own conviction that the classic form has little meaning for the ear accustomed to English metre; they are rather fourteen line poems on subjects similar to those he treats in other forms.

¹⁴ "November", "October", "Midsummer", and "To Cole, the Painter, Departing for Europe".

¹⁵ "Mutation".

There is no proper distinction between the octet and sestet function discernible. His favorite rhyme scheme is ABBACDDCEFFEGG. The single Petrarchan instance is the Portuguese sonnet, while "November", quoted here, is Shakespearean:

Yet one smile more, departing, distant sun!
One mellow smile through the soft, vapory air,
Ere, o'er the frozen earth, the loud winds run,
Or snows are sifted o'er the meadows bare.
One smile on the brown hills and naked trees,
And the dark rocks whose summer wreaths are cast,
And the blue gentian flower, that, in the breeze,
Nods lonely, of her beauteous race the last.
Yet a few sunny days, in which the bee
Shall murmur by the hedge that skirts the way,
The cricket chirp upon the russet lea,
And man delight to linger in thy ray.
Yet one rich smile and we will try to bear
The piercing winter frost, and winds, and darkened air.

The sonnets of Bryant certainly comprise a praiseworthy beginning, but, indeed, a solitary beginning, for the next notable use of the form was by HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW (1807-1882). In the six sonnets which appeared upon the fly leaves of his three-volume translation of Dante's "Divina Commedia" and in the ensuing sonnets which the last years of his long life permeated with gravity, Longfellow has fashioned poems worthy of the respect of those who disapprove of his more easy verse.

Whereas Bryant's sonnets were written in the poetic prime of his youth, Longfellow's were an occupation of elderly years saddened by the loss of his wife. His inspiration throughout his life is Dante, to whom he turned consistently for wisdom and solace. He expresses this in the first sonnet in the sequence, "Divina Commedia":

Oft have I seen at some cathedral door
A laborer pausing in the dust and heat,
Lay down his burden, and with reverent feet
Enter, and cross himself, and on the floor
Kneel to repeat his paternoster o'er;
Far off the noises of the world retreat;
The loud vociferations of the street
Become an undistinguishable roar.
So, as I enter here from day to day,
And leave my burden at this minster gate,
Kneeling in prayer, and not ashamed to pray,
The tumult of the time disconsolate
To inarticulate murmur dies away,
While the eternal ages watch and wait.

It is a natural result that so great an admirer of old Italy should make preponderant use of the effective Italian form ABBAABBA CDECDE; only a few sonnets fail of that enrichment.

His subjects embrace appreciation of English poets, including Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, and Tennyson, presentation of personal problems or sorrows, such as the sonnet to the memory of his wife and the one expressing concern about his children, and some excellent poems applying phenomena of nature to human situations.

No one or two sonnets are capable of representing him in this field, but the two entitled "My Cathedral" and "Nature" will best suffice:

MY CATHEDRAL

Like two cathedral towers these stately pines
Uplift their fretted summits tipped with cones;
The arch beneath them is not built with stones,
Not Art but Nature traced these lovely lines,
And carved this graceful arabesque of vines;
No organ but the wind here sighs and moans,
No sepulchre conceals a martyr's bones,
No marble bishop on his tomb reclines.
Enter! the pavement, carpeted with leaves,
Gives back a softened echo to thy tread!
Listen! the choir is singing; all the birds,
In leafy galleries beneath the eaves,
Are singing! listen, ere the sound be fled,
And learn there may be worship without words.

NATURE

As a fond mother when the day is o'er,
Leads by the hand her little child to bed,
Half-willing, half-reluctant to be led,
And leave his broken playthings on the floor,
Still gazing at them through the open door,
Nor wholly reassured and comforted
By promises of others in their stead,
Which, the more splendid, may not please him more;
So Nature deals with us, and takes away
Our playthings one by one, and by the hand
Leads us to rest so gently that we go
Scarce knowing if we wish to go or stay,
Being too full of sleep to understand
How far the unknown transcends the what we know.

Longfellow was not alone in sonnet activity in his time. Mention should be made of four poets whose sonnet work appeared in the same period.

Two volumes of verse published in 1856 contained sonnets:

"Plays and Poems" by GEORGE HENRY BOKER (1823-1890), and

"Songs of Summer" by RICHARD HENRY STODDARD (1825-1903).

Chiefly a writer of historic tragedies, Boker's sonnets are (1) of love, sometimes in the Elizabethan fashion, sometimes in his own vigorous way (as in "I shall be faithful", "No gentle touches of your timid hand," and "I wonder, darling, if there does not wear"); (2) philosophical; or, (3), exhortative appeals to patriotism: in one case to Englishmen during the Crimean war, in another to America, echoing the same perfervid martial song:

TO AMERICA

II

What though the cities blaze, the ports be sealed,
The fields untilled, the hands of labor still,
Ay, every arm of commerce and of skill
Palsied and broken; shall we therefore yield--
Break up the sword, put by the dintless shield?
Have we no home upon the wooded hill,
That mocks a siege? No patriot ranks to drill?
No nobler labor in the battlefield?
Or grant us beaten. While we gather might,
Is there no comfort in the solemn wood?
No cataracts whose angry roar shall smite
Our hearts with courage? No eternal brood
Of thoughts begotten by the eagle's flight?
No God to strengthen us in solitude?

A New York journalist and editor, Stoddard secluded himself from the national drama which climaxed in the Civil War to write from bookish inspiration such sonnets as:

"POEMS OF THE ORIENT"

We read your little book of Orient lays,
And half believe old superstitions true;
No Saxon like ourselves, an Arab, you,
Stolen in your babyhood by Saxon fays.
That you in fervid song recall the blaze
Of eastern suns; behold the deep-blue skies;
Lie under rustling palms; breathe winds of spice,
And dream of veiled sultanas, is no praise.
All this is native to you as the air;
You but regain the birthright lost of yore:
The marvel is it now becomes our own.
We wind the turban round our Frankish hair,
Spring on our steeds, that paw the desert's floor,
And take the sandy solitude alone!

The more illustrious THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH (1836-1907) spaced his editorial and narrative work with carefully made lyrics which he published collectively late in life under the name, "Songs and Sonnets". His touch is that of an accomplished carver, one plane above direct human contact. "Sleep" is illustrative:

When to soft sleep we give ourselves away,
And in a dream as in a fairy bark
Drift on and on through the enchanted dark
To purple daybreak -- little thought we pay
To that sweet bitter world we know by day.
We are clean quit of it, as is a lark
So high in heaven no human eye can mark
The thin swift pinion cleaving through the gray.
Till we awake ill fate can do no ill,
The resting heart shall not take up again
The heavy load that yet must make it bleed;
For this brief space the loud world's voice is still,
No faintest echo of it brings us pain.
How will it be when we shall sleep indeed?

These poets were of the North. Meanwhile, in the South, PAUL HAMILTON HAYNE(1830-1886), imaginative leader of a group in Charleston, S. C., editor of the literary monthly, "Russell's Magazine", interspersed miscellaneous lyrics with sonnets in a melodious style manifestly a product of an old and revered culture. The Civil War destroyed the young man's property and health; disease thereafter constantly warred with him in his secluded Georgia retreat. His sonnets do not record his reactions to these personally disappointing developments, although his vision of Laocoon in a fireplace is suggestive of imagery twisted by an over-aliveness to pain:

LAOCOON

A gnarled and massive oak log, shapeless, old,
Hewed down of late from yonder hillside ray,
Grotesquely curved, across our hearthstone lay;
About it, serpent-wise, the red flames rolled
In writhing convolutions; fold on fold
They crept and clung with slow portentous sway
Of deadly coils; or in malignant play,
Keen tongues, outflashed, twixt vaporous gloom and gold.
Lo! as I gazed, from out that flaming gyre
There loomed a wild weird image, all astrain
With strangled limbs, hot brow, and eyeballs dire,
Big with the anguish of the bursting brain:
Laocoon's form, Laocoon's fateful pain.
A frescoed dream on flickering walls of fire!

All in all, the few American sonnet poets that preceded the modern period displayed certain differentiating tendencies which suggested trails for their able modern successors to follow.

Concerning subject-matter, we notice a significant turning away from the boundaries set by Milton toward a wider, more varied province having much to do with nature, although in the main they fail to make the form an instrument of deep personal expression. With regard to rhyme, they showed a definite aptitude for Petrarchan sestets following a variation of the Petrarchan octet, such as ABBAACCA or ABBACDDC, and flaunted the time-aged easy rhyme sounds much too frequently. The prevailing structure respecting embodiment of idea, however, with Longfellow the single exception, is strong evidence in its lack of dual development of a regrettable misapprehension regarding the sonnet's integral characteristics.

CHAPTER SIX

THE MODERN SONNET

The Transition Years in England

The generation graced by John Davidson and Francis Thompson, while fond of depreciating the Victorians, was unable to produce a poet to rank with Tennyson, Browning, and Swinburne. Not until the second decade of the twentieth century, when the "Georgian poetry" of Gibson, Brooke, Abercrombie, and Drinkwater appeared,¹ did there arise the hope of a renaissance in verse. The sonnet sequences of Blunt and Lee-Hamilton and the brilliant individual sonnets written by Mrs. Meynell before her marriage suggest a leaning toward the modern range with a retention of the Victorian sonnet imperfections.

Post-Victorian Sonnet Writers: Wilfred Scawen Blunt (1840-1922)

The two-volume "Poetical Works" of Wilfred Scawen Blunt appearing in 1914 and edited by the author contain 316 sonnets, all but forty-five being grouped in sequences entitled as follows: "The Love Sonnets of Proteus," 1880; "In Vinculis," 1889; "A New Pilgrimage," 1889;

¹See p. 161.

"Esther," 1892; "Griselda," 1893; and "Natalia's Resurrection". His prolific sonnet activity was an informal attendant of his active, travel-filled life. He championed successively Mohammedan, Egyptian, and Irish causes, his heretical enthusiasm for the last bringing him a two-month term of imprisonment. Lacking the capacity to make one interest or the other major, he became neither a major political nor literary figure. His paternal inheritance left him free to do as he wished.

His experimentations in sonnet form are seemingly innumerable. Chiefly, however, they may be summarized by saying that, in his three most valued sequences, "Proteus," "A New Pilgrimage," and "Esther", he uses respectively: ABABBCBCDEFDEF and sestet variations; ABABBCBCDEDEDD; and ABABCDCEFEFFGG. A sestet break of a sort is utilized, varying in position and definition. Rhymes are often poor, frequently being di-syllabic and more frequently approximate.² These characteristics tend to strengthen a conclusion that his sonnets were written hurriedly and lack careful revision. They were penned, however hurriedly, by a person given to philosophic examination of experience and to its lyric voicing.

²In a sampling of twenty-eight sonnets twenty indefensible instances of approximate rhyme were found, and five di-syllabic pairs.

Of the sonnets exemplary of his work at its best, the thirty-sixth in "New Pilgrimage" is most eloquent of his outlook, ideals, and sonnet style:

The majesty of Rome to me is nought;
The imperial story of her conquering car
Touches me only with compassionate thought
For the doomed nations faded by her star,
Her palaces of Caesars tombstones are
For a whole world of freedoms vainly caught
In her high fortune. Throned was she in war;
By war she perished. So is justice wrought;
A nobler Rome is here, which shall not die.
She rose from the dead ashes of men's lust,
And robed herself anew in chastity,
And half redeemed man's heritage of dust.
This Rome I fain would love, though darkly hid
In mists of passion and desires scarce dead.

Post-Victorian Sonnet Writers: Austin Dobson (1840)

By the side of his wage-earning official life, sustained by governmental positions, Austin Dobson built a fame-earning artistic life, publishing volumes of verse from 1873 to 1885³ that established him as an accomplished technician in the making of crisply clean and delicately rounded lyrics. Since that time he has centred his attention upon writing personable and somewhat biographical essays of little known people. His sonnets are not so significant or well-known as his other work, but one, "Don Quixote" reveals with novel imagery his dominating interest:

3

Vignettes in Rhyme, 1873; Proverbs in Porcelain, 1877; Old World Idylls, 1883; and At the Sign of the Lyre, 1885.

Behind thy pasteboard, on thy battered hack,
Thy lean cheek striped with plaster to and fro,
The long spear levelled at the unseen foe,
A doubtful Sancho trudging at thy back,
Thou wert a figure strange enough, good lack!
To make Wiseacredom, both high and low,
Rub purblind eyes, and (having watched thee go),
Dispatch its Dogberries upon thy track:
Alas! poor Knight! Alas! poor soul possessed!
Yet would to-day, when courtesy grows chill,
And life's fine loyalties are turned to jest,
Some fire of thine might burn within us still!
Ah! would but one might lay his lance to rest,
And charge in earnest -- were it but a mill.

Post-Victorian Sonnet Writers in England: Eugene Jacob

Lee-Hamilton (1845-1907)

One more name is added to the long list of creative artists saddened by the presence of great personal sorrow and hardship, for in his thirtieth year Eugene Lee-Hamilton suffered paralysis as the result of a nervous breakdown and when, in twenty years' time, physical subjection had been almost completely mastered and a subsequent marriage brought the joy of a baby daughter, grief over her death at two years of age claimed his strength again. This time he did not recover.

His paralytic score of years witnessed the fruition of seven volumes of verse, including some individual sonnets, such as "Sunken Gold", which are widely quoted, and a volume of lightly-drawn portraits of legendary characters which he entitled, "Imaginary Sonnets". Out of bed, he recorded his experience in "Sonnets of the Wingless Hours", in which occurs:

Hybrid of rack and of Procrustes' bed,
Thou thing of wood, of leather, and of steel,
Round which, by day and night, at head and heel,
Crouch shadowy Tormentors, dumb and dread;
Round which the wingless Hours, with feet of lead
Forever crawl....

Finally his daughter's death compelled him to write the sonnet sequence "Mimma Bella", an expression of parental grief, a catalogue of parental memories.

Lee-Hamilton wrote no sonnets, properly speaking. His constant failure to appreciate the dual nature of the sonnet's unity is explained by the idea of its character revealed in his sonnet on the sonnet: "Fourteen small broidered berries on the hem of Circe's mantle," "Fourteen of lone Calypso's tears," "It is the pure white diamond Dante brought to Beatrice," "The dark, deep emerald that Rossetti wrought for his own soul". In general he chose excellent rhyme schemes, preferring the sestets CDCDCD and CDECDE after an octet invariable ABBAABBA. He foreshadows modern intimacy in some sonnets, probably best in sonnet 17 of "Mimma Bella":

Do you recall the scents, the insect whir,
Where we had laid her in the chestnut shade?

One of his finest passages is in sonnet 14 of the same sequence:

O pale pressed Rosebud in the Book of Death,
Where thou outlastest many a perfect rose
That strews her petals at her full life's close
Beneath November's violating breath....

Post-Victorian English Sonnet Writers: Alice Thompson

Meynell (1849-1922)

Although she was a personally shy young woman, charming in manner and pleasant in feature, Alice Thompson insistently allied herself with the crusade for woman's political representation for the same reasons that her heart went out in all its emotional strength toward anyone socially unfortunate; her first volume of poetry, "Preludes", published in 1875, is her best. One of the sonnets in the book, "My heart shall be thy garden", quoted in a review, attracted Wilfred Meynell, whom she married, and with whom she raised seven children during the forty-five happy years of their life together. Her absorption in a home career precluded further significant poetic output although in 1893 she published "Poems", in 1917 "A Father of Women", and in 1923 "Last Poems" and a collected edition appeared. She enjoyed the literary friendship and strong approval of Meredith, Rossetti, Coventry Patmore and Francis Thompson.

All of her sonnets show a durable and smoothly unrestrained emotional fibre, previously unusual in a woman. Take lines 1-4 of "Changeless":

A poet of one mood in all my lays,
Ranging all life to sing one only love,
Like a west wind across the world I move,
Sweeping my harp of floods mine own wild ways.

In "Renouncement", one of the poems in "Preludes", she has given us a sonnet which bears the same stamp as Drayton's "Since there's no help"; that is to say, which may be included among the half-dozen great emotional sonnets in the language:

I must not think of thee; and tired yet strong,
I shun the thought that lurks in all delight--
The thought of thee--and in blue Heaven's height,
And in the sweetest passage of a song.
Oh, just beyond the fairest thoughts that throng
This breast, the thought of thee waits, hidden yet bright,
But it must never, never come in sight;
I must stop short of thee the whole day long.
But when sleep comes to close each difficult day,
When night gives pause to the long watch I keep,
And all my bonds I needs must loose apart,
Must doff my will as raiment laid away,--
With the first dream that comes with the first sleep
I run, I run. I am gathered to thy heart.

Post-Victorian Sonnet Writers in England: Sir Edmund Gosse
(1849-1928)

Famed for his biographical and critical studies of poets, Sir Edmund Gosse achieved a graceful proficiency himself, between 1873 and 1901 publishing six volumes of verse. His sonnets were rhymed according to miscellaneous schemes, respected the sestet break, and possessed real but unimpressive melody. His best three are: "The Voice of Dante," "Gabriel Rossetti," "The Pipe Player," and

ON A LUTE FOUND IN A SARCOPHAGUS

What curled and scented sun-girls, almond eved,
With lotus blossoms in their hands and hair,
Have made their swarthy lovers call them fair,
With these spent strings, when brutes were deified,
And Memnon in the sunrise sprang and cried,
And love-winds smote Bubastis, and the bare
Black breasts of carven Pasht received the prayer

Of supplicants bearing gifts from far and wide!
This lute has outsung Egypt; all the lives
Of violent passion, and the vast calm art
That lasts in granite only, all lie dead;
This little bird of song alone survives,
As fresh as when its fluting smote the heart
Lasttime the brown slave wore it garlanded.

Post-Victorian Sonnet Writers in England: Philip Bourke

Marston 1850-1887

Three volumes of verse came from the pen of Philip Marston "Songtide" (1871) "All in All" (1875), and "Wind Voices" (1883) becoming more and more dyed with melancholy as total blindness more and more completely enshrouded him. Dreams of sleep and of the repose of death followed his early idyllic nature poems. He found an extensive audience in America. His form closely follows the Victorian eccentricities.

AT THE LAST

Because the shadows deepened verily,--
Because the end of all seemed near forsooth,--
Her gracious spirit, ever quick to ruth,
Had pity on her bond-slave, even on me.
She came in with the twilight noiselessly,
Fair as a rose, immaculate as truth;
She leaned above my wrecked and wasted youth;
I felt her presence, which I could not see.
"God keep you, my poor friend," I heard her say;
And then she kissed my dry hot lips and eyes.
Kiss thou the next kiss, quiet Death, I pray;
Be instant on this hour, and so surprise
My spirit while the vision seems to stay;
Take thou the heart with the heart's paradise.

Transition Sonnet Writers in America

In America the sonnet had not taken firm hold. Poets individual enough to feel the pulse of the nation were striving to find more suitable forms than they deemed the old to be.

RICHARD WATSON GILDER (1844-1909) succeeded in adding a unit to the sonnet's literature on the sonnet:

What is a sonnet? 'Tis the pearly shell
That murmurs of the far-off murmuring sea;
A precious jewel carved most curiously;
It is a little picture painted well.
What is a sonnet? 'Tis the tear that fell
From a great poet's hidden ecstasy:
A two-edged sword, a star, a song---ah me!
Sometimes a heavy-tolling funeral bell.
This was the flame that shook with Dante's breath;
And the clear glass where Shakespeare's shadow falls:
A sea this is--beware who ventureth!
For like a fjord the narrow floor is laid
Mid-ocean deep to the sheer mountain walls.

Born in Spain and reared in America, educated at Harvard and professor of philosophy there from 1889 to 1912, a salient side of GEORGE SANTAYANA'S life (1863-) appears in the sonnets written during the third decade of his life in his student days. They are marked by an unhurried, even rhythm, scarcely a line being broken in any way, by a tone that calls to one's mind no picture quite so clearly as the afterglow of sunset, by an intelligent, self-depreciative reasoning. Their many faults of rhyme are compensated by the author's consistent regard for octet and sestet content.

In the sonnet beginning,

O Martyred Spirit of the helpless Whole,
Who dost by pain for tyranny atone,
And in the star, the atom, and the stone,
Purgest the primal guilt,

he has released a sound effectiveness and a movement more powerful than is characteristic of him, but in "Deem not, because you see me in the press" he has come closest to sonnet excellence:

Deem not, because you see me in the press
Of this world's children run my fated race,
That I blaspheme against a proffered grace,
Or leave unlearned the love of holiness.
I honour not that sanctity the less
Whose aureole illumines not my face,
But dare not tread the secret, holy place
To which the priest and prophet have access.
For some are born to be beatified
By anguish, and by grievous penance done;
And some, to furnish forth the age's pride,
And to be praised of men beneath the sun;
And some are born to stand perplexed aside
From so much sorrow--of whom I am one.

The most promising poet of the post-war period, RICHARD HOVEY (1864-1900) had contrived to leave behind the prevalent Swinburnian mannerism for a more masculine, deeper song when death ended his career. His sonnets are marred by scorn of form, such as the sestet arrangement CDEECD, the weak rhymes revealing, feeling, concealing, and kneeling, and the sestet space in:

ACCIDENT IN ART

What painter has not with a careless smutch
Accomplished his despair? --one touch revealing
All he had put of life, thought, vigor, feeling,
Into the canvas that without that touch
Showed of his love and labor just so much
Raw Pigment, scarce a scrap of soul concealing!
What poet has not found his spirit kneeling
A-sudden at the sound of such and such
Strange verses staring from his manuscript.
Written he knows not how, but which will sound
Like trumpets down the years. So Accident
Itself unmasks the likeness of Intent,
And even in blind Chance's darkest crypt
The shrine-lamp of God's purposing is found.

General Characteristics of the Modern Period (1912).

Broadly, modern American poetry developed⁴ quietly between the "nineties" and the year 1912, being unappreciated until "The Lyric Year", containing Miss Millay's "Renascence", focused attention upon its distinctive style and encouraged the beginning of imagist verse. For a time afterwards an attitude of pitying condescension toward the limitations of the traditional poetic forms was the rule, but in 1920 there emerged a well-defined desertion movement from within the imagist ranks involving Ezra Pound, John Gould Fletcher, H. D., and Alfred Kreymbourg, and leaving Amy Lowell in possessive solitude. Of the ancient metrical patterns that of the sonnet has come to be most generally favored by our poets in the last ten years.

The main-spring of modernity in poetry is a simplicity, which demands absolute sincerity of speech, a naked poetic structure undiminished in strength by diverting ornament, a use of words apt in sound, association,

⁴The developments preceding 1912 focussed in certain events prophetic of the modern technique: (1) in the seven editions and complete collection of Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" between 1855-1892; (2) in the novel craftsmanship of Emily Dickinson first displayed in "Poems", 1890; (3) in the "Vagabondia" of Richard Hovey and Bliss Carman from 1894 to 1900; (4) in the unacclaimed debut of E. A.

and appearance as well as meaning, and a psychologic probing of the major motives of human action.

Characteristics of the Modern Sonnet.

Generally, contemporary poets have brought to the sonnet form the genius peculiar to modern poetry. Specifically, the event exposes four characteristics:⁵
(1) a modification of the Miltonic and Wordsworthian tradition of sonnet austerity; (2) an extension of the limits defining appropriate subject-matter; (3) increased intimacy of mood; and (4) a corresponding informality of manner.

(1) The nub of the difference brought out by a comparison of modern sonnets with those of Milton is a discrediting of the dicta that reserved the sonnet for the grand, preponderantly vital, deeply furrowing experiences. Old themes were paraded in informal dress. Oppose "Methought I saw my late-espoused Saint" or

When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent

Robinson's "Children of the Night" in 1897; and (5) in the birth of social conscience recorded in Edwin Markham's "The Man with the Hoe", 1899.

⁵ The analysis is that of David Morton in "The Sonnet Today--and Yesterday".

To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest He returning chide,--
Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?
I fondly ask:--But Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies; God doth not need
Either man's work, or His own gifts: who best
Bear His mild yoke, they serve Him best: His state
Is kingly; thousands at His bidding speed
And post o'er land and ocean without rest:--
They also serve who only stand and wait.

to Miss Millay's flippant "Oh, think not I am faithful
to a vow", "I shall forget you presently, my dear", and
"Oh, oh, you will be sorry for that word",⁶ Winifred Jackson's
"Pitch o' Pine Sonnets",⁷ Dorothy Reid's "Mrs. Dugan's Mir-
rors",⁸ and the various portraiture sonnets.⁹ Or make a
less extreme contrast with Frost's "Mowing",¹⁰ Robinson's

6

Oh, oh, you will be sorry for that word:--
Give back my book and take my kiss instead.
Was it my enemy or my friend I heard:
"What a big book for such a little head."
Come, I will show you now my newest hat,
And you may watch me purse my mouth, and prink!
Oh, I shall love you still, and all of that
I never again shall tell you what I think.
I shall be sweet and crafty, soft and sly;
You will not catch me reading any more.
I shall be called a wife to pattern by;
And some day when you knock and push the door,
Some sane day, not too bright and not too stormy,
I shall be gone, and you may whistle for me.

7

"Quills", no. 2 of this group, is quoted on p. 144

8

No. 3 of this sequence is given on p. 145

9

See p. 143-145

10

Quoted on p. 169

"The Clerks",¹⁰ Ficke's "What is he but a common gutter-cur?", and Brooke's "The Busy Heart". This means merely that a prepossessing number of sonnets are informal in their effect; many are true to the older standard, such as: Miss Millay's famous sonnet on beauty,¹² Robinson's "L'Envoi",¹³ Lola Ridge's "Eyre"¹⁴ Sterling's two-sonnet

11

I did not think that I should find them there
When I came back again; but there they stood,
As in the days they dreamed of when young blood
Was in their cheeks and women called them fair.
Be sure, they met me with an ancient air,--
And yes, there was a shop-worn brotherhood
About them; but the men were just as good,
And just as human as they ever were.
And you that ache so much to be sublime,
And you that feed yourselves with your descent,
What comes of all your visions and your fears?
Poets and kings are but the clerks of Time,
Tiering the same dull webs of discontent,
Clipping the same sad alnage of the years.

12

Quoted on p. 181

13

Now in a thought, now in a shadowed word,
Now in a voice that thrills eternity,
Ever there comes an onward phrase to me
Of some transcendent music I have heard;
No piteous thing by soft hands dulcimered,
No trumpet-crash of blood-sick victory,
But a glad strain of some vast harmony
That no brief mortal touch has ever stirred.
There is no music in the world like this,
No character wherewith to set it down,
No kind of instrument to make it sing.
No kind of instrument? Ah, yes, there is;
And after time and place are overthrown,
God's touch will keep its one chord quivering.

14

Quoted on p. 145

tribute to Shakespeare,¹⁵ Miss Reese's "Tears",¹⁶ Ficke's
"Since beauty holds no lease of settled date",¹⁷ and
Pulsifer's "Harvest of Time".¹⁸

(2) One immediate indication of the new liberation
appeared in the extension of areas considered appropriate
for sonnet treatment. The whole tendency found an enemy

¹⁵
"On the Skull of Shakespeare".

¹⁶
Quoted on p. 163

¹⁷
No. 13 of the sonnet-sequence "Rue de Vents":

Since beauty holds no lease of settled date,
And youth has tenure but while roses blow,
And mortal hope must yield to mortal fate,
And every dream that comes must one day go--
Since these most lovely phantoms cannot be
Companions in the grey years that confess
Wild love to hold life's chiefest sovereignty,
Yet must without it seek for happiness--
Then let the autumn of the soul become
Transfigured with its own appropriate hues;
As, in high pageant, when the flowers are dumb
Old forests lift the splendor earth must lose,
And hills with solemn foliage of fall
Outvaunt the spring, in phantom festival.

¹⁸
Time winnows beauty with a fiery wind,
Driving the dead chaff from the living grain.
Some day there will be golden sheaves to bind;
There will be wonder in the world again.
There will be lonely phrases born to power,
There will be words immortal and profound;
Though no man knows the coming of the hour,
And no man knows the sower or the ground.
It may be even now the ranging earth
Lifting to glory some forgotten land
Feels their deep beauty awakening to birth,
Sprung from the sowing of the hidden hand.
Beauty endures though towering empires die.
O, speed the blown chaff down the smoking sky!

in Daniel Henderson, who wrote:

Scorn now the sonnet--that enchanted reed
Italia wrought for Will of Avon's art;

Is now a penny flute in any mart--

In reality, the movement was one of impatience toward convention in thought, feeling, and style, a characteristic which is reflected more in some Elizabethan sonnets of Drummond, Shakespeare, and Donne than in most that follow that period. In "Spring Bereaved", for instance,¹⁹ Drummond makes a complete departure from the mannered language of the court that finds a type-relative in Lizette Woodworth Reese's "Spicewood":

The spicewood burns along the gray, spent sky
In moist, unchimneyed places, in a wind,
That whips it all before and all behind,
Into one thick, rude flame, now low, now high;
It is the first, the homeliest thing of all--
At sight of it the lad that by it fares,
Whistles afresh his foolish, town-caught airs--
A thing so honey-colored and so tall!
It is as though the young year, ere he pass,
To the white riot of the cherry-tree,
Would fain accustom us, or here or there,
To his new sudden ways with bough and grass,
So starts with what is humble, plain to see,
And all familiar as a cup, a chair.

19

Lines 1-4 suggest the similarity:

Sweet spring, thou turn'st with all thy goodly train,
Thy head with flames, thy mantle bright with flowers;
The zephyrs curl the green locks of the plain,
The clouds for joy in pearls weep down their showers.

So, from the nature sonnets of the early Americans to the psychological personal analyses of the modern New England sonneteers the form swept into world-wide areas and penetrated all experiences. In England, A. Y. Campbell's "Dromedary"²⁰ and W. W. Gibson's "Tenants"²¹ are illustrative; in America, we have F. E. Hill's "Tennis" and Mrs. Embry's "Tea", Babette Deutsch's "In

20

In dreams I see the Dromedary still,
As once in a gay park I saw him stand:
A thousand eyes in vulgar wonder scanned
His humps and hairy neck, and gazed their fill
At his lank shanks and mocked with laughter shrill.
He never moved: and if his Eastern land
Flashed on his eye with stretches of hot sand,
It wrung no mute appeal from his proud will.
He blinked upon the rabble lazily;
And still some trace of majesty forlorn
And a coarse grace remained: his head was high,
Though his gaunt flanks with a great mange were worn:
There was not any yearning in his eye,
But on his lips and nostril infinite scorn.

21

Suddenly out of dark and leafy ways,
We came upon the little house asleep
In clod, blind stillness, shadowless and deep,
In the white magic of the full moon-blaze:
Strangers without the gates, we stood agaze,
Fearful to break that quiet, and to creep
Into the house that had been ours to keep
Through a long year of happy nights and days.
So unfamiliar in the white moon-gleam,
So old and ghostly like a house of dream
It seemed, that over us there stole the dread
That even as we watched it, side by side,
The ghosts of lovers, who had lived and died
Within its walls, were sleeping in our bed.

a Museum" and Donald Evans' "In the Vices", Florence Kiper Frank's "The Jews to Jesus" and Kreymbourg's "A Man Whom Men Deplore", Ruth Mitchell's "The Travel Bureau", and William Rose Benet's "The Tricksters", and, indubitably, Christopher Morley's "Savage Portraits".²²

(3) Foreshadowed by Meredith in such lines as

A world of household matters filled her mind,
Wherein he saw hypocrisy designed:
She treated him as something that is tame,
And but at other provocation bites.²³

and by Rossetti at times like:

Lady, I thank thee for thy loveliness,²⁴
Because my lady is more lovely still.

increased intimacy of feeling in the modern sonnet came

²² One of the "Savage Portraits":

THE GOOGS

"Precious!" says Mrs. Goog. And, "Love!" cries he,
And smacks his liar's lips against her face.
"Sweet Dove!"--and then they clinch in close embrace.
He's thirty-one and she's turned fifty-three;
She makes him pet her when there's company.
"My Angel!" "Little Wife!"--and all men trace
The hatred crawling through his forced grimace;
Some day he'll kill her to be rich and free.
If I am on Goog's jury then he'll hang;
I know just how he trapped the love-starved hag;
True, she caught him with coins that clinked and rang...
But he--I've heard that saffron cheese-rind brag!--
"My own, my Dove!" "Come, kiss me, precious pet!"--
Kiss her, you crook; it is your life-work: Sweat!

²³ "Modern Love", sonnet 5.

²⁴ "The Moonstar", sonnet 30 of "The House of Life".

to supplant grandeur and majesty in the old. This was true of every kind of sonnet. In love sonnets contrast poems of Edna St. Vincent Millay, Elinor Wylie, or Alice Meynell with Sidney and Shakespeare. In poems descriptive of nature, set against Wordsworth's "Evening at Calais Beach" Hortense Flexner's "Treasure":

The little pilfering hands of hours and days
Bury more loveliness and treasured gold,
Savor and essence, cloud and warm scent and haze,
Small things accustomed, all too frail to hold.
But I would have remembrance full and keen,
Nor yield one leaf, or cloud, or shadow's blue,
One little thrusting wind, one hill's tall green,
The outer way of wonder we passed through.
The fear grows with me that I shall forget,
Never you love, but half seen things of grace,
Beauty we took and marvelled at and set
Aside, half-blindly, marking not its place;
This wealth put by, this gold too faint and rare,
I cannot count--and yet I cannot spare.

In memorial sonnets no treatments could be more diverse than in Milton's "To His Deceased Wife" and Ficke's sonnet upon the death of his wife²⁵ or Iris Tree's reminis-

²⁵ They brought me tidings, and I did not hear
More than a fragment of the words they said.
Their further speech died dull upon my ear;
For my rapt spirit elsewhere had fled--
Fled unto you in other times and places,
Old memories winged about me in glad flight.
I saw your lips of longing and delight,--
Your grave, glad eyes beyond their chattering faces,
I saw a world where you have been to me
More than the sun, more than the wakening wind.
I saw a brightness that they could not see.
And yet I seemed as smitten deaf and blind.
I heard but fragments of the words they said.
Life wanes. The sunlight darkens. You are dead.

cence of her father, Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree:

I cannot think that you have gone away,
You loved the earth-- and life lit up your eyes,
And flickered in your smile that would surmise
Death as a song, a poem, or a play.
You were reborn afresh with every day,
And baffled fortune in some new disguise.
Ah! can it perish when the body dies,
Such youth, such love, such passion to be gay?
We shall not see you come to us and leave
A conqueror--nor catch on fairy wing
Some slender fancy--nor new wonder weave
Upon the loom of your imagining.
The world is wearier, grown dark to grieve
Her child that was a pilgrim and a king.

(4) The corresponding intimacy of manner accompanying these homely moods is so obvious as to need no citing of instance other than those already given under the three preceding topics.

The Sonnet of Portraiture

The paean of praise constituting the traditional dedicatory sonnet, of which Wordsworth's sonnet to Milton is typical, was superseded by a psychologically incisive and humanly sensitive sonnet of portraiture, blending desire and deed, heritage and accomplishment, destiny and meaning in one vivid portrait. E. A. Robinson must be credited with its invention and its most compelling use, for two score uniformly good sonnets by him have captured the personalities of familiar people. "The Clerks", already

quoted,²⁶ is illustrative of group treatment; while

"Karma", given here, portrays an individual:

Christmas was in the air and all was well
With him, but for a few confusing flaws
In divers of God's images. Because
A friend of his would neither buy nor sell,
Was he to answer for the axe that fell?
He pondered; and the reason for it was,
Partly, a slowly freezing Santa Claus
Upon the corner, with his beard and bell.
Acknowledging an improvident surprise,
He magnified a fancy that he wished
The friend whom he had wrecked were here again.
Not sure of that, he found a compromise;
And from the fullness of his heart he fished
A dime for Jesus who had died for men.

Another poet native to Maine has contributed sonnets to this field. In "Pitch o' Pine Sonnets" Winifred Jackson has drawn three sketches in narrative, "John's Mary," "Quills," and "Clem's Fool", of which the second is:

Si's temper was barbed-quilled as a hedgehog's tail
And threw quills when he went to get a drink
And found but tepid water; on the brink
Of the well curb they fell clanking on the pail.
For weeks the quills would fly if a dry-rot rail
Was hooked from the pasture fence, and left a chink
For jumping cows to munch on corn. The swink
Of hunting hen's nests was a quill-gybed flail.
Si's wife used tweezers: eased her mind's grim tread
By yank of quills from flesh that silenced groans.
Si's son they worked in, on and around his bones
With pain-jabbed waves of hot and hateful dread,
Until one day quite worn with dragging stones
He hurled one at the quills, and crushed Si's head.

Dorothy Reid's six sonnets on "Mrs. Dugan's Mirrors" and

²⁶P. 127.

three on "The Exploration of Oliver" are collective portrayals. No. 3 is representative of their manner:

Jim Metzger's boy took berries to the door
One summer, just to get a look inside;
The open window led him to confide
In desperate means. His feet were on the floor,
And he was needing very little more
Than just the ghosts that leaped before his eyes,
A thousand ghosts in shirts and dotted ties,
To satisfy his longing to explore.
But when the light was better, all his dread
Was lost in admiration at the row
On row of Jimmy Metzgers grinning down,
Until he heard the swishing of a gown.
A thousand ear-lobes blushed a fiery red,
And several hundred fingers pointed, "Go!"

Further evidences of this activity are found in Harriet Sampson's "Tithes", Harold Vinal's "Recluse", and Hortense Flexner's "Moment in Marble", in Margaret Perkins Briggs' personifications of rural objects as in "Winter Trees":

Over their stark austerity the trees
Put on such nonchalance as women might
Who have been proud and lovely,

and in Lola Ridge's emolument to Edwin Arlington Robinson:

EYRIE

Only in silence can one hear, as you,
The single sounds that, harshly incomplete,
Yet throb to golden music when they meet,
As one clear symphony. With altered hue--
Turned faintly roseblush, faring to the blue
Vast grape of night--day lays down at your feet
Such tardy gifts as you, who for no sake
Find stooping easy, may yet leave or take--
you, who know stars by day where they go veiled
On secret silver thresholds, who have scaled
High sunsets, and loved gold hair too much
Too use--save for such moments as might leave
A strand of light that should forever weave
About the heart, and tighten at the touch.

The Sonnet of Singing Lyricism.

The tendency of the nineteenth century to sublimate a sonnet sestet distinct in function and idea from the octet has found favor to a considerable extent with the moderns. Consequently, we have acquired some rhapsodic delineative lyrics beautifully lodged within the sonnet form yet with unity undistinguished by trace of dual division. Arthur Davison Ficke's fresh contributions of sonnets on aspects of instants in nature are poems in point.²⁷ Rupert Brooke's third sonnet, "The Dead,"²⁸ in the war group "1914" is one of this type. The terse, etched, level beauty of Elinor Wylie's confessional sonnet probably ranks it higher than either Ficke's or Brooke's and may be as excellent an example as has been written:

27

APRIL MOMENT

Come forth! for spring is singing in the boughs
Of every white and tremulous apple tree.
This is the season of eternal vows;
yet what are vows that they should solace me?
For on the winds wild loveliness is crying,
And in all flowers wild joy its present worth
Proclaims, as from the dying to the dying--
"Seize, clasp your hour of sun upon the earth!"
Then never dream that fire or beauty stays
More than one April moment in its flight
Toward regions where the sea-drift of all days
Sinks in a vast, desireless, lonely night.
What are eternal vows!--oh, give me breath
Of one white hour here on the marge of death!

²⁸See p. 142.

Down to the Puritan marrow of my bones
There's something in this richness that I hate.
I love the look, austere, immaculate,
Of landscapes drawn in pearly monotone.
There's something in my very blood that owns
Bare hills, cold silver on a sky of slate,
A thread of water, churned to milky spate
Streaming through slanted pastures fenced with stones.
I love those skies, thin blue or snowy gray,
Those fields sparse planted, rendering meagre sheaves;
That spring, briefer than apple blossom's breath,
Summer, so much too beautiful to stay,
Swift autumn, like a bonfire of leaves,
And sleepy winter, like the sleep of death.

The Extent of the Present Sonnet Vogue.

An heartening characteristic of the present period is its incredibly widespread poetic activity, as many as 10,000 people²⁹ attempting poetic composition and close to 400 poets being important enough for inclusion in Braithwaite's biographical dictionary.³⁰ A detailed study of sonneteers of the time must deal with twenty-one English figures and fifty Americans.³¹

²⁹ The figure given by the compiler of "The Lyric Year", 1912, to indicate the number of artists who contributed poems.

³⁰ A di-annual feature of his "Anthology of Magazine Verse".

³¹ English:

NAME	DATES
1. Wilfred Scawen Blunt	1840-1922
2. Thomas Hardy	1840-
3. Austin Dobson	1840-
4. Andrew Lang	1844-1912
5. Robert Bridges	1844-

6. Alice Meynell	1849-1922
7. Ernest Rhys	1859-
8. Lord Alfred Bruce Douglas	1870-
9. Maurice Baring	1874-
10. John Masefield	1874-
11. Wilfred Gibson	1878-
12. Thomas M. Kettle	1880-1917
13. Margaret Sackville	1881-
14. James Stephens	1882-
15. John Collings Squire	1884-
16. Siegfried Sassoon	1886-
17. Katherine Mansfield	1891-1923
18. Wilfred Owen	1893-1918
19. Aldous Huxley	1894-
20. Charles H. Sorley	1895-1915
21. James E. Flecker	

American:

NAME	DATES	BIRTHPLACE	RESIDENCE
1. Richard Watson Gilder	1844-1909		
2. William Dudley Foulke	1848-	NYC	NYC
3. James Whitcomb Riley	1849-1916		
4. Edwin Markham	1852-	Oregon	NYC
5. George Edward Woodberry	1855-	Mass.	Mass.
6. Lizette Woodworth Reese	1856-	Md.	Md.
7. George Sterling	1869-1926	N. Y.	
8. Edgar Lee Masters	1869-	Kan.	Chicago
9. Edwin Arlington Robinson	1869-	Maine	NYC
10. Leonora Speyer	1872-	D. C.	NYC
11. Robert Frost	1875-	Cal.	Mich.
12. Karle Wilson Baker	1878-	Ark.	Texas
13. John Erskine	1879-	NYC	NYC
14. Charles Wharton Stork	1881-	Phila.	Phila.
15. Maxwell Struthers Burt	1882-	Phila.	N. J.
16. Arthur Davison Ficke	1883-	Ia.	NYC
17. Alfred Kreymbourg	1883-	NYC	NYC
18. Charles L. O'Donnell	1884-	Ind.	Notre Dame
19. Hortense Flexner	1885-	Ky.	Bryn Mawr
20. John Urban Nicholson	1885-	Kan.	Ill.
21. Louis Untermeyer	1885-	NYC	NYC
22. William Rose Benet	1886-	NYC	NYC
23. Richard Le Gallienne	1886-	England	NYC
24. David Morton	1886-	Ky.	Amherst
25. Harold Trowbridge Pulsifer	1886-	Conn.	NYC
26. John Hall Wheelock	1886-	NYC	NYC

27. Henry Martin Hoyt	1887-1920	Pa.	
28. Elinor Wylie	1887-1928	N. J.	
29. Scudder Middleton	1888-	NYC	NYC
30. Clement Wood	1888-	Ala.	NYC
31. Christopher Morley	1890-	Pa.	NYC
32. Frederick F. Van de Water	1890-	N. J.	NYC
33. Harold Vinal	1891-	Maine	NYC
34. Edwin Curran	1892-	Ohio	
35. Archibald MacLeish	1892-	Ill.	France
36. Maxwell Bodehheim	1893-	Miss.	NYC
37. Robert Nathan	1894-	NYC	NYC
38. Babette Deutsch	1895-	NYC	N. Y.
39. Robert Leopold Wolf	1895-	Chi.	Conn.
40. John William Andrews	1898-	Bryn Mawr	New Haven
41. Virginia McCormick		Va.	Va.
42. Edward David Kennedy	1901-	Mass.	Ohio
43. Rembrandt Wm. B. Ditmars			NYC
44. May Doney			
45. Jacqueline Embry		Ky.	Ky.
46. Donald Evans			
47. Florence Kiper Franck		Kan.	Ill.
48. Anita Grannis			
49. Ruth Comfort Mitchell		Cal.	Cal.
50. Eloise Robinson			

Sonnets of the War (1914-1918)

In the press of war, when those distinctions which aesthetic civilization has required aeons to establish are felled at one stroke by the imperatives of battle, when the tragedy of human sacrifice goes far deeper than mere life, poets of the ranks left records of their fears and faiths, sufferings and exaltations in sonnets, realistic, strong, stirring. Sometimes the sternness is indirectly revealed, as in the volatile ALAN SEEGER's³² "There have been times":

There have been times when I could storm and plead,
But you shall never hear me supplicate.
These long months that have magnified my need
Have made my asking less importunate,
For now small favors seem to me so great
That not the courteous lovers of old time
Were more content to rule themselves and wait,
Easing desire with discourse and sweet rhyme.
Nay, be capricious, wilful; have no fear
To wound me with unkindness done or said,
Lest mutual devotion make too dear
My life that hangs by a so slender thread,
And happy love unnerve me before May
For that stern part that I have yet to play.

This poet, American, lover of life and varied pleasure,

³²Born in New York City in 1888, Seeger grew up on Staten Island, spent several adolescent years in Mexico, studied at Harvard from 1906-1910, and enlisted in the French Foreign Legion in 1914 destined to meet death two years later. His only volume of poems was published posthumously in 1916.

and seemingly lover of death, drew universal attention with his lyric "I have a rendezvous with Death", and fashioned in the last few momentous months of his life a vigorous, serious, romantic series of sonnets far different from his previous carefree work.

The thoughts of THOMAS MICHAEL KETTLE³³ (1880-1917) turned from the discomforts companion to war to his daughter at home and took form in a noble sonnet, admirable in every way as to construction, and a rare example of typical sonnet idea and mood:

TO MY DAUGHTER BETTY, THE GIFT OF GOD

In wiser days, my darling rosebud, blown
To beauty proud as was your mother's prime,
In that desired, delayed, incredible time
You'll ask why I abandoned you, my own,
And the dear heart that was your baby throne,
To dice with death. And oh! they'll give you rhyme
And reason: some will call the thing sublime,
And some decry it in a knowing tone.
So here, while the mad guns curse overhead,
And tired men sigh with mud for couch and floor,
Know that we fools, now with the foolish dead,
Died not for flag, nor King, nor Emperor,
But for a dream born in a herdsman's shed,
And for the secret Scripture of the poor.

RUPERT BROOKE (1887-1915) stands at the crest of

³³ Kettle is known as an Irish essayist, but wrote some poems which were published posthumously in a collection entitled, "Poems and Parodies"; "To My Daughter Betty" was written in the field before Guillemont, Somme, and is by far his best poem.

war poets who voice the idealistic interpretation of war aims. His enlistment was preceded by five volumes of poems and a little promising critical work. The series of five sonnets, "1914," will remain a high point in English nationalistic poetry, although they are handicapped by extremely individual conceptions of sonnet form.³⁴ The third and fifth sonnets have been favored most; the fifth being the address of "The Soldier" to his mother country, beginning:

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England.

and the third being an appreciation of "The Dead":

Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!
There's none of these so lonely and poor of old,
But dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold.
These laid the world away; poured out the red
Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be
Of work and joy, and that unhopèd serene
That men call age; and those who would have been,
Their sons, they gave, their immortality.
Blow, bugles, blow! They brought us for our dearth,
Holiness, lacked so long, and Love, and Pain.
Honour has come back, as a king, to earth,

³⁴The rhyme schemes of the sonnets in this group are nondescript: 1 and 5, "Peace" and "The Soldier", have ABABCD CD EFDEFD; 2, "Safety," is Shakespearean; 3, "The Dead," has ABBACDDC EFEGFG; and 4, "The Dead," ABABCD CD EEFGFG.

And paid his subjects with a royal wage;
And Nobleness walks in our ways again;
And we have come into our heritage.

In the later period of the war idealism gave way to the bitterness which has characterized so many phases of post-war life. Glorious aims became befogged unrealities as the stark facts of killing, the slime of dugout life, the absence of any daily activities save those of primitive civilization at its constant worst, year after year deadened nobility in human nature.
35 36
SIEGFRIED SASSOON (1886) and WILFRED OWEN (1893-1918) are the sonneteers of that disillusionment. Sassoon introduced it with a comparatively mild contrast of inherent desire and imperative duty in the average soldier:

DREAMERS

Soldiers are citizens of death's gray land,
Drawing no dividend from time's to-morrows.
In the great hour of destiny they stand,
Each with his feuds, his jealousies, and sorrows.
Soldiers are sworn to action; they must win
Some flaming, fatal crisis with their lives.

35

Sassoon has written three volumes of war verse: "The Old Huntsman" (1917), "Counter Attack" (1918), and "Picture Show" (1920). "Counter Attack" marks the triumph of bitterness over smooth lyricism in his poetry.

36

A brilliant and unusually well educated man, Owen was killed in action during the last week of the war after three years' of service. Sassoon found, arranged, and introduced his collected "Poems" in 1920. Previously he was unknown to literature.

Soldiers are dreamers; when the guns begin
They think of firelit homes, clean beds, and wives.
I see them in foul dugouts, gnawed by rats,
And in the ruined trenches, lashed with rain,
Dreaming of things they did with balls and bats,
And mocked by hopeless longing to regain
Bank holidays, and picture shows, and spots,
And going to the office in the train.

Owen presents the soldier's tragedy unrelieved by
suggestion of compensation:

THE ANTHEM FOR DOOMED YOUTH

What passing bells for these who died as cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries for them; no prayers or bells,
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs--
The shrill demented choirs of wailing shells:
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.
What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of good-byes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall,
Their flowers the tenderness of patient winds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

Detached alike from either of these, the poetry

37

of CHARLES HAMILTON SORLEY (1895-1915) breathes a cool
aloofness reflecting a philosophic mind. The second of
"Two Sonnets" upon death breaks at the fourth line into
what may be construed as the sestet of a double sonnet:

37
Of more commanding promise than any fellow young poets,
Sorley's twenty years of life left the fruitage of
"Marlborough and Other Poems".

Such, such is Death; no triumph: no defeat:
Only an empty pail, a slate rubbed clean,
A merciful putting away of what has been.
And this we know: Death is not Life effete,
Life crushed, the broken pail. We who have seen
So marvellous things know well the end not yet.
Victor and vanquished are alike in death:
Coward and brave: friend, foe. Ghosts do not say,
"Come, what was your record when you drew breath?"
But a big blot has hid each yesterday
So poor, so manifestly incomplete.
And your bright promise, withered long and sped,
Is touched; stirs, rises, opens and grows sweet
And blossoms and is you, when you are dead.

In spite of Sorley's emotional stability, the poetry of the world war, meagre in extent, is generally of indifferent quality of execution. Only in the white heat of its faith or its disgust does it partake of immortality. Written in haste and subject to disturbing interruption, the importance of consideration of form and the process of patient polishing were lost in the disturbing excitements of the moment.

Modern English Sonnet Writers:

The new poetry in England has made little use of the sonnet. Masfield issued a volume containing sixty-one sonnets in 1915; Rupert Brooke wrote some occasional sonnets and his short sequence, "1914"; Wilfred Gibson has sixteen sonnets accredited to him; John Drinkwater,³⁸ James

³⁸"Love in October" is his best:

The fields, the clouds, the farms and farming gear,
The drifting kine, the scarlet apple tree....

Stephens,³⁹ James E. Flecker,⁴⁰ and C. H. Sorley have writ-

Not of the sun but separate are these,
And individual joys, and very dear;
Yet when the sun is faded, they are here
No more, the drifting skies: the argosies
Of wagoned apples: still societies
Of elms: red cattle on the stubbled year.
So are you not love's whole estate. I owe
In many hearts more dues than I shall pay;
Yet is your heart the spring of all love's light,
And should your love weary of me and go
With all its thriving beams out of my day,
These many loves would founder in the night.

³⁹Such sonnets as "Seumas Beg" or

SLAN LEATH

And now, dear heart, the night is closing in,
The lamps are not yet ready, and the gloom
Of this sad winter evening, and the din
The wind makes in the street fells all the room.
You have listened to my stories--Seumas Beg
Has finished the adventures of his youth,
And no more hopes to find a buried keg
Stuffed to the lid with silver. He, in truth,
And all alas, grew up; but he has found
The path to truer romance, and with you
May easily seek wonders. We are bound
Out to the storm of things, and all is new.
Give me your hand, so, keeping close
Shut tight your eyes, step forward--where are we?

⁴⁰"The Second Sonnet of Bathrolaire" is an example of his fantastic gravity.

Over the moonless land of Bathrolaire
Rises at night, when revelry begins,
A white unreal orb, a sun that spins,
A sun that watches with a sullen stare
That dance spasmodic they are dancing there,
Whilst drone and cry and drone of violins
Hint of the sweetness of forgotten sins,

ten a few, but this very nearly exhausts the output.

Abercrombie, Davies, and De La Mare find the form too ill suited, the one to his complex metaphysical thinking, the second to his vagabondage, the last to his rhythm.

The four years of war had a great deal to do with this. Brooke, Owen, Kettle, and Sorley were sacrificed to the conflict. Sassoon was permanently embittered by the experience. It is possible that the post-war poets found the rounded sufficiency of the sonnet too little expressive of their nervous exhaustion.

Modern English Sonnet Writers: John Masefield (1874).

Wanderer, sea-lover, John Masefield early wrote memorable ballads of the sea. His poetical reputation was founded, however, upon the appearance of "The Everlasting Mercy", 1911, and his subsequent application of the Chaucerian stanza to the eventful lives of commonplace people in "The Widow in Bye Street", 1912, "Dauber", 1912, and

Or call the devotees of shame to prayer,
And all the spaces of the midnight town
Ring with appeal and sorrowful abuse.
There some most lonely are: Some try to crown
Mad lovers with sad boughs of formal yews,
And Titan women wandering up and down
Lead on the pale fanatics of the muse.

"The Daffodil Fields," 1913. The harsh real tone of these poems is softened in his next volume, "Good Friday and Other Poems," 1916, the latter half of which presents sixty quietly questioning sonnets in the Shakespearean form. The sonnets themselves are not representative of his most memorable work or of his most advanced technique, although it was inevitable that some should be gems. The first is one, although its⁴¹ lyric octet is marred by a wretched approximate rhyme in the closing couplet.⁴² "Flesh, I have knocked at many a dusty door," is another, with an opening worthy of any sonnet theme:

Gone down full many a windy midnight lane,
Probed in old walls and felt along the floor,
Pressed in blind hope the lighted window-pane.

His sonnet to his strange indefinite God, who, "even as Time, Cradles the generations of man's soul" rounds in rhyme an unaffected humility:

41

Long, long ago, when all the glittering earth
Was heaven itself, when drunkards in the street
Were like mazed kings shaking at giving birth
To acts of war that sickle men like wheat,
When the white clover opened Paradise
And God lived in a cottage up the brook,
Beauty, you lifted up my sleeping eyes
And filled my heart with longing with a look;

42 The breath I breathed, the brook, the flower, the grass
Were her, her word, her beauty, all she was.

You are more beautiful than women are,
Wiser than men, stronger than ribbed death,
Juster than Time, more constant than the star,
Dearer than love, more intimate than breath;

I like a blind man stumble from the crowd
Into the darkness of a deeper hour,
Where in the lonely silence I may wait
The prayed-for gleam -- your hand upon the gate.

The final sonnet extends this humility to the breadth of
all humanity and to the length of all time:

Let that which is to come be as it may,
Darkness, extinction, justice, life intense,
The flies are happy in the summer day,
Flies will be happy many summers hence.
Time with his antique breeds that built the Sphynx
Time with her men to come whose wings will tower,
Poured and will pour, not as the wise man thinks,
But with blind force, to each his little hour.
And when the hour has struck, comes death or change,
Which, whether good or ill, we cannot tell,
But the blind planet will wander through her range
Bearing men like us who will serve as well.
The sun will rise, the winds that ever move
Will blow our dust that once were men in love.

When we have included with these the sonnet
beginning:

Not for your human beauty nor the power
To shake me by your voice or by your touch,

we have cited the exceptional sonnets of the volume. Too
many rank with the prosody of lines like "There is no God,
as I was taught in youth," and "Here, where we stood together,
we three men." They are free in general from the careless
rhymes found in parts of "The Everlasting Mercy" and the

following Chaucerian tales, such as is and was-Caiaphas and Susan's-nuisance, although in particular they make free with the pronoun I, the syllabic sounds i and e, and approximations.⁴³ The faults seem to grow in clusters, as in "Man has his unseen friend", which has for octet rhyme the words twin, possibility, inn, by, clay, see, hay, be. "Time being an instant in eternity", which uses eternity, see, die, free, in the first four lines.

Masefield's sonnets breathe a mellow paternal fragrance, having little in common with the intimacies of the younger modernists.

43

Grass-was noted in connection with the first sonnet, is used also to close "Roses are beauty, but I never see"; -ly and ai frequent; and "It may be so with us, that in the dark" has tell, miracle.

Modern English Sonnet Writers: Wilfred Wilson Gibson (1878)

With John Drinkwater, Rupert Brooke, and Lascelles Abercrombie, Wilfred Gibson formed "The Georgians", a little group of twentieth century poets banded together more for the promulgation of renewed interest in their art than for any common belief, passion, or similarity of manner. Their intention was to publish the best that each wrote in an anthology called, "Georgian Poetry". This they did in volumes representing the years 1911-12, 1913-15, and 1916-17. The war did much to defeat a program that began with encouraging success.

Gibson's significant poetry began with the publication of "Stonefolds" in 1907. His subsequent volumes show an increase in power and skill with the exception of "Livelihood", which has elements of the theatrical. He helped a great deal to introduce free verse into England, and dealt in this medium with common people and common occupations. As much as the sonnet will allow, the lilt of his verse is carried over into it. The same man who wrote

With still eyes ever on my hands
With eyes that seemed to burn my hands,
My wincing over-wearied hands,
She watched, with bloodless lips apart,
And silent, indrawn breath;
And every stroke my chisel cut, 14
Death cut still deeper in her heart:

may certainly be credited with "Night":

Vesuvius, purple under purple skies
Beyond the purple, still, unrippling sea;
Sheer amber lightning, streaming ceaselessly
From heaven to earth, dazzling bewildered eyes
With all the terror of beauty: thus day dies
That dawned in blue, unclouded innocence;
And thus we look our last on Italy
That soon, obscured by night, behind us lies.
And night descends on us, tempestuous night,
Night, torn with terror, as we sail the deep;
And like a cataract down a mountain-steep
Pours, loud with thunder, that red perilous fire....
Yet shall the dawn, O land of our desire,
Show thee again, re-orient with light!

Two short sequences, "Rupert Brooke" and "Home", added to his eight separate sonnets, represent his activity in this field. The trueness of his idea of sonnet purpose is at once apparent in the clear sestet breaks and in the direct relation his subjects have to universal life. As much can not be said for his rhymes: the sonnets abound in such weaknesses as exultantly, ecstasy rhyming with high, sky; as riotously, wistfully, revelry; as oranges with memories; and as a sestet with I, sky, way, wistfully, see, grey, and an octet with lay, day, play, spray. In order to rhyme, too, he lowers the standards for the sake of innovation: two sonnets have the odd schemes ABCCBADD EFTFEE and ABCCBADD LFCFGE; the rest, save one, have the Petrarchan octets ABBA ABBA but follow them with poor variations, favoring CDDDED and CDDDED.

The Modern American Sonnet

For the time being at least, the course of the English sonnet has indubitably turned to America. In Robinson, Ficke, Wylie, and Millay the United States has developed conscientious sonneteers whose work has shown a strong individual interpretation of experience in a critically respectable sonnet form and whose ultimate degree of importance we must wait for the future to appraise.

Modern American Sonnet Writers: Lizette Woodworth Reese (1856)

A native and resident of Baltimore, Maryland, where, ten years ago, she relinquished her task of teaching English in the Western High School, Lizette Woodworth Reese recorded the observations of the new poetry in the language of the old, being to that extent a pioneer. "Spicewood"⁴⁵ is a beautiful addition to our nature Sonnets, and "Tears" to our more thoughtful type.

TEARS

When I consider Life and its few years--
A wisp of fog betwixt us and the sun;
A call to battle, and the battle done
Ere the last echo dies within our ears;
A rose choked in the grass; an hour of fears;
The gusts that past a darkening shore do beat;
The burst of music down an unlistening street,--
I wonder at the idleness of tears.

Ye old, old dead, and ye of yesternight,
Chieftains, and bards, and keepers of the sheep,
By every cup of sorrow that you had,
Loose me from tears, and make me see aright
How each hath back what once he stayed to weep:
Homer his sight, David his little lad!.

Modern American Sonnet Writers: Edwin Arlington Robinson

(1869)

Born and brought up near Gardiner, Maine, student for three years at Harvard, penurious poet in New York City until aided by Roosevelt in 1912, Edwin Arlington Robinson allowed nothing to deter him from the artistic analysis of person, occurrence, occasion, and experience to which he had set his hand. To-day he enjoys the approval of a subtle audience, whose very numerical limits portend the favor his works will always find in like minds.

His approach to a subject is that of a Puritan armed with the weapons of new science. The observer, rather than the direct participator, the scalpel of his mind peels layer after layer of circumstantial tissue until primary motive is revealed. His use of words, concepts, images is fresh and his own; so homely and familiar at times that the new reader is tempted to disparage them as terms too near the humdrum of existence,

yet which coalesce into symphonic unity a succession of intellectually arresting and stimulating images.

46

The collected edition of his sonnets gives eighty-nine creations in that form and constitutes an attainment of remarkably level excellence.⁴⁷ Forty are portraiture sonnets, two examples of which are given on pages 127 and 134. "Fleming Helphenstine," "How Annandale Went Out," "Aaron Stark," and "Cliff Klingenhagen" have taken their place as achievements in the class of his ballads "Miniver Cheevy" and "Flammonde". Yet none shows the poet's surgeon-mind at work to better advantage than "Firelight":

Ten years together without yet a cloud,
They seek each other's eyes at intervals
Of gratefulness to firelight and four walls
For love's obliteration of the crowd.
Serenely and perennially endowed.
And bowered as few may be, their joy recalls
No snake, no sward, and over them there falls
The blessing of what neither says aloud.
Wiser for silence, they were not so glad
Were she to read the graven tale of lines
On the wan face of one somewhere alone;
Nor were they more content could he have had
Her thoughts a moment since of one who shines
Apart, and would be hers if he had known.

46 "Sonnets," The Macmillan Company, 1928

47 The sonnets of Ficke, Wylie, and Millay show a similarly gratifying sustenance.

Robinson overwhelmingly approved the Petrarchan form of rhyming. All but seven octets rhyme ABBAABBA; while of the eighty-two accompanying sestets twenty-five rhyme CDECDE, twelve CDCEED, nine CCDEED, eight CDCDCD, six CDDECE, and the remaining twenty-two are distributed among ten other variations. This body of poems make conjecture possible regarding the influence of the most approved rhyme schemes upon sonnet effectiveness. It is a fact that his most impressive sonnets, excepting "Annandale" and "The Garden of the Nations", all rhyme either ABBAABBA CDECDE⁴⁸ or ABBAABBA CDCDCD⁴⁹. Sestet break comes regularly at the end of the ninth line, and his conception of sestet construction in cases where any division is permissible is clearly one of two tercets.

The people he selects for portrayal are usually human enough to combine contradictory elements, to manifest antithetical virtues and vices. He undertakes to synthesize these antitheses. A failure in the eyes of the world has to him elements of success, an envied gentleman has justifiable cause of suicide, a respected man is deemed worthy of death at the hands of his physician. There is no archetype of any good or bad thing on earth.

48 Namely: "The Clerks," "Fleming Helphenstine," "L'Envoi," "Firelight," "Many are Called," "Karma," "The Laggard," and "If the Lord would make Windows in Heaven."

49 Namely: "New England" and "A Christmas Sonnet".

One point remains. He felt keenly the precariousness of an earnest artist's position in America at the present time. "Demos," and "The Garden of the Nations" express that trepidation. But with equal keenness he felt the weight of the burden of unavoidable labor resting upon the ranked and filed shoulders of humanity. This he crystallizes exquisitely in "The Laggards":

Scorners of earth, you that have one foot shod
With skyward wings, but are not flying yet,
You that observe no goal or station set
Between your groping and the towers of God
For which you languish, may it not be odd
And avaricious of you to forget
Your toll of an accumulating debt
For dusty leagues that you are still to plod?
But many have paid, you say, and paid again;
And having had worse than death are still alive,
Only to pay seven-fold, and seven-times seven.
They are many; and for cause not always plain,
They are the laggards among those who strive
On earth to raise the golden dust of heaven.

Modern American Sonnet Writers: George Sterling (1869-1926)

Although born in Sag Harbor, N. Y., and educated in various eastern private schools, George Sterling spent the greater part of his life in California, bringing to his work a vigor and grandiloquence possibly encouraged by the scenic dimensions of the region and the idiosyncracies of his neighbors. Most of the ten volumes of verse that he wrote is extravagantly flamboyant. His typical poetry is

contained in "The Testimony of the Suns" (1903), "A Wine of Wizardry" (1908), and "The House of Orchids and Other Poems" (1911). "The Black Vulture," a sonnet admirable structurally is an example of his simpler style:

Aloof upon the day's immeasured dome,
He holds unshared the silence of the sky,
Far down his bleak, relentless eyes descry
The eagle's empire and the falcon's home--
Far down, the galleons of the sunset roam;
His hazards on the sea of morning lie;
Serence, he hears the broken tempest sigh
Where cold sierras gleam like scattered foam.
And least of all, holds the human swarm--
Unwitting now that envious men prepare
To make their dream and its fulfilment one,
When, poised above the caldrons of the storm,
Their hearts, contemptuous of death, shall dare
His roads between the thunder and the sun.

Modern American Sonnet Writers: Robert Frost (1875)

Quaintly contrary to the exodus of Sterling, Frost chose to return from California to the New Hampshire of his father's boyhood. He has expressed the fundamentals of New England life so clearly, humanly, and maturely as to win a premier place in American Literature. In the sonnet field, though, he has ventured rarely and with pungent variations. "Putting in the Seed" rhymes ABABABAB DCDCEE, "Mowing" ABCABDECDFEGFG, "The Oven Bird" AABCBD CD EFGFG, "A Vantage Point" ABBA ACCA CDDCEE, and "Range Finding" ABBAABBA CCDEED. "On a Tree" is of the Shakespearean type. "Mowing" most frequently represents him, but "Range Finding" surpasses it as a sonnet:

MOWING

There never was a sound beside the wood but one,
And that was my long Scythe whispering to the ground.
What was't it whispered? I knew not well myself;
Perhaps it was something about the heat of the sun,
Something, perhaps, about the lack of sound--
And that was why it whispered and did not speak.
It was no dream of a gift of idle hours,
Or easy gold at the hand of fay or elf:
Anything more than the truth would have seemed too weak
To the earnest love that laid the swale in rows,
Not without feeble-pointed spikes of flowers
(Pale orchises), and scared a bright green snake.
The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows
My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make.

RANGE FINDING

The battle rent a cobweb diamond-strung
And cut a flower beside a ground bird's nest
Before it stained a single human breast.
The stricken flower bent double and so hung.
And still the bird revisited her young.
A butterfly its fell had dispossessed
A moment sought in air his flower of rest,
Then lightly stooped to it and fluttering clung.
On the bare upland pasture there had spread
O'er night 'twixt mullein stalks a whell of thread
And straining cables wet with silver dew.
A sudden passing bullet shook it dry.
The indwelling spider ran to greet the fly,
But finding nothing, sullenly withdrew.

Modern American Sonnet Writers: William Ellory Leonard
(1876)

Leonard's sojourns in universities (Boston, Bonn, Gottingen, and Columbia) fitted him for a successful teaching career. Yet he has been more successful as a poet specializing in the sonnet mode. "Two Lives", a sequence of 200 sonnets printed upon his friends' strong urgings,

is his best work. The sequence is a rhymed decasyllabic narrative intriguing as a story but hardly representative of sonnet literature or standards, for the individual sonnets are incidents, scenes, showing no other than chronological development. Many of the final lines are anti-climatic, such as: "I spied a placard: 'Attic room to let'", "' And have you seen the old man's daughter?'-- 'Who?'", " And daughter of the house of Tantalus", "Because ('tis all we know), because they are", and "In intellect, the man, from joy exiled."

A more representative sonnet than any of these and one more fair to his ability in this field is his "Victor":

Man's mind is larger than his brow of tears;
This hour is not my all of time; this place
My all of earth; nor this obscene disgrace
My all of life: and thy complacent sneers
Shall not pronounce my doom to my compeers
While the Hereafter lights me in the face,
And from the Past, as from the mountain's base
Rise, as I rise, the long tumultuous cheers.
And who slays me must overcome a world:
Herves at arms, and virgins who became
Mothers of children, prophecy and song;
Walls of old cities with their flags unfurled;
Peaks, headlands, ocean and its isles of fame--
And sun and moon and all that made me strong!

Modern American Sonnet Writers: Arthur Davison Ficke (1865).

Of Ficke's eleven volumes of poetry the "Sonnets of a Portrait Painter", first published in 1914, "The War on the Hilltop," 1915, "An April Elegy," 1917, and "Out of Silence and Other Poems", 1921, place him among the poetic elect. Particularly is he a sonnet poet, for, aside from the 1914 volume, he has written sonnet sequences on the following versatile themes: "Nocturne in Library," fifteen sonnets in five groups; "Mementos from the Lost Years," occasional values salvaged from the turmoil of war; "Beauty in Exile;" "Rue de Vents", fifteen sonnets to some beautiful young woman; "Don Quixote;" "On Tide of Time;" "The Middle Years;" "Fantasy for a Charming Friend;" "King of Salamanders, To John Cowper Powys;" and "Guide to China."

His life has been given to four activities; the first, from 1904 to 1908, the routine of a student at Harvard, until 1917 the practice of law, from 1917-1919 soldier in the American Expeditionary Force, and, finally, a frank engagement in literary composition.

Ficke's sonnets betray a nature in which sentiment longing after beauty and love meet with inevitable pessimism. The one accounts for the fierce, rather rough accents of portrait 26⁵⁰ and of the sestet in portrait 33:

50 What is he but a common gutter-cur,
A chattering mountebank, obese and base?

Ah, yes, we all must love the sapphire lake,
The rainbow and the rose, -- but these alone?
Or is there some slight wonder where pines shake
On bare-ribbed winter-peaks of shattered stone?
So these disturb? I fear this is the end
Of days when I shall please your taste, my friend.

the other instills the reflective peace of "Since Beauty
Holds no Lease".⁵¹ His discouragement over the futility of
his attempts at understanding things seems to remove his
poetry from the heights of the greatest and most lasting
verse, although he has unquestioned proficiency. As:

When the mad tempest of the blood has died
And sleep comes on, still I am half aware
Of the long sloping music of your side,
And windy light is round me in your hair;
I move through dusks between the day and night
When night and day and vision intertwine;
The breast of Her who was the gods' delight
Touches a cheek I vaguely know is mine.
Doubt and believing mingle while there stirs
Your hand that wakens mine out of its dream,
Hope knows not what is hers, our Memory hers,
Amid the marble curves that change and stream;
And only Beauty, through dim lights, can claim
These hours that have no time or place or name.

And yet perhaps your judgment may prefer
— Mid grinning to my thin and furrowed face.
My rival! ... Laugh! the word burns on my lips,
Acknowledging equality in that breath
With him who is my equal but where slips
All forr from life, and men are one in death.
He is with you now: -- what words now from him fall?
What answering smile lights your alluring eyes?
Madness leers at me as my thoughts recall
The love that late between us cried, -- and cries! ...
Well, go! My mirth goes with you, who might be
A lamp to earth, a bright star from the sea.

⁵¹ Quoted on p. 138

"Moments from the Lost Years" expresses foreboding, first of the coming war, as in the sonnets dated March 5th, 1916, when "terrible shadows seem to fill the world", and February 3rd, 1917, when he writes:

To-morrow--ah, to-morrow we shall be
Motes of a nation summoned to endure
Whirlwind and rocks and overwhelming sea.

and, second, of the insecurity of the peace to be attained, as in his sonnet of October first, 1918, in which he prophesies that, after "The incessant tearing shocks of sudden guns" has ceased, we shall

See ignorant mobs bring the new hates to birth
Their secret madness will possess the earth
When the frank madness of the guns is dumb.....

The death of his wife did for him what life and love could not, caused him to produce a sonnet instinct with reality, to forget his forebodings and desires, even as the imagery of the poem suggests. "They brought me tidings, and I did not hear."⁵² is that poem. A less perfect reflection of this mood, reminiscent in a way of Sidney's "Thou blind-man's mark; thou fool's self-chosen snare" is the fifth sonnet in "Tides of Time":

This strange importuning! this dull desire
Claiming a pageant past its mortal day!
Certain it is the earth shall end in fire
Or ice, and our long toil be swept away
Or pass so changed it bears no likeness then
To that creation whose each line we proved.
The statue's beauty and the deeds of men
Have term, though nobly planned, superbly loved.

Wickes is contributing to literature some of the most workmanlike sonnets of the day. Choosing nearly always the Shakespearean form, he has paid close attention to structural details, avoiding hackneyed rhymes, observing in nearly every instance a proper sestet development and confinement, sustaining his variable rhythm with rugged good taste. His sonnets, however, say too often the same thing in similar words. However subordinate he may be deemed in the province of poetry, his substantiality in the sonnet field will remain convincing.

Modern American Sonnet Writers: John Hall Wheelock (1886)

A self-chosen solitude has marked the life of John Hall Wheelock from beginning to the present. His love for the city and for the sea have fed upon lonely contemplation and lonely activity. The mark of spiritual intimacy which his work bears is most evident in his earliest and his latest work: "The Human Fantasy" and "The Black Panther", the title poem of the latter being one of his sonnets:

There is a panther caged within my breast;
But what his name there is no breast shall know
Save mine, nor what it is that drives him so,
- Backward and forward in relentless quest --
That silent rage, baffled but unsuppressed,
The soft pad of those stealthy feet that go
Over my body's prison to and fro,
Trying the walks forever without rest.

All day I feed him with my living heart;
But when the night puts forth her dreams and stars,
The inexorable Frenzy reawakes:
His wrath is hurled upon the trembling bars,
The eternal passion stretches me apart,
And I lie silent --- but my body shakes.

Modern American Sonneteers: Elinor Wylie (1887-1928).

The reputation of Elinor Wylie is based upon three volumes of poetry: "Nets to Catch the Wind", 1921; "Black Armour", 1923; and "Angels and Earthly Creatures", 1928, put in order for publication the day before her sudden death. Although the majority of her poems are lyrics outside the sonnet form, the sonnet "Down to the Puritan marrow of my bones" stands out among her miscellaneous works as a limpid statement of her poetic aims as well as a record of her revolt against the social life in which she was engaged in Washington, D. C. She was thrice married, the last time happily to William Rose Benet, and the tone of her poetry reflects, first, in its metallic brilliance the thwarted fullness of an eager woman, second, in its suffusion of technique with womanly warmth the happiness and stimulation of her life in the New York circle. The latter quality is arrestingly apparent in "One Person", a series of nineteen sonnets appearing in "Angels and Earthly Creatures", -so much so that she

assails the sonnetic position of her friend Miss Millay with potential success, mirroring, as she does in them a love less Epicurean, more Platonic than Millay's sophistication allows.

The typical form of the sonnets in "One Person" is shaped by the rhyme scheme ABBAABBA CDDCEE, which is used in the introductory sonnet and in sonnets 1, 3, and 8-18. The other sonnets have identical octet schemes but vary the sestet as follows: in 2 and 5, CDDCEE; in 4, CDCDEE; in 6, CDDCCD; and in 7, CDEECD. It is our misfortune that she chose to disregard the less strong but more beautiful rhyming plan CDECDL; it would have harmonized well with her "pearly monotones". The sestet break is gracefully, properly, and uniformly observed. The rhyme sounds are well chosen, full, varied, and unlabored. To the "precise" and "scrupulous" terminology with which her name is instantly associated she has added a soft accent. Compare the sonnet quoted on page 14 (of first copy) with sonnets 5 and 10 from her last offering, observing the degree to which she succeeds in shrouding her "cold silver" in personal radiance:

The little beauty that I was allowed --
The lips new-cut and coloured by my sire,
The polished hair, the eyes' perceptive fire --
Has never been enough to make me proud:

For I have moved companioned to a cloud,
And lived indifferent to the blood's desire
Of temporal loveliness in vain attire:
My flesh was but a fresh-embroidered shroud.
Now do I grow indignant with the fate
Which made me so imperfect to compare
With your degree of noble and of fair;
Our elements are the farthest skies apart;
And I enjoin you, ere it is too late,
To stamp your superscription on my heart.

When I perceive the sable of your hair
Silvered, and deep within those caverns are
Your eyesockets, a double-imaged star,
And your fine substance fretted down by care,
Then do I marvel that a woman dare
Prattle of mortal matters near and far
To one so wounded in demonic war
Against some prince of Sirius or Altair.
How is it possible that this hand of clay
Though white as porcelain can contrive a touch
So delicate it shall not hurt too much?
What voice can my invention find to say
So soft, precise, and scrupulous a word
You shall not take it for another sword?

Modern American Sonnet Writers: Conrad Aiken (1889)

Houston Peterson has collected nine previously unpublished sonnets by Conrad Aiken in the final section of "The Book of Sonnet Sequences", and is authority for the statement that they were written sequentially during the winter of 1926-27. They were cut to the Shakespearean pattern and limn the promise of merit more than its realization.

Sonnet 8 is best:

Here's Nature: it's a spider in a flower,
Poison in honey, darkness in delight,
Disastrous door that tolls delirium's hour
The arrow of mischief in the brightest light.

What's love, with doubt's slow venom mixed, unless
It be a most ecstatic hue of hate?
Joy, in the heart, grows dumb with bitterness;
The serpent coils bright rings by Eden gate.
Nor can the eye, or cunning brain, remove
Loathing from love, or honor from mistrust
Horror with beauty wrangles in this love,
The angle wrestles with the fiend of lust.
Not here, not there, will Eros rest his head,
Nor sleep, and smile in sleep, till we be dead.

Modern American Sonnet Writers: Edna St. Vincent Millay
(1892).

Born amid the beauties of south-eastern Maine,
trained by a mother-poet impatient of low standards,
suddenly famed because her "Renaissance" was not accorded
a prize by the "Lyric Year" in 1912, a girl of nineteen,
senior at Vassar, entered upon a course which two decades
of adulation have not deflected. That career has been
diverted, however, by her years in New York from the
religious breadth of "Renaissance" and "God's World" to
a sensuous intimate anthem of love's rapture and love's
brevity. With skill that merits the adjective "consum-
mate", she attributes to that exaltation of individuality
arising from deep love the homage of supreme intrinsic
good.

In "Fatal Interview" fifty-two sonnets tell a
woman's story of the life and death of love. Turned into
the Shakespearean mould, many of them command the Shake-
spearean tone, this being especially true of sonnets 32

(Time that is pleased to lengthen out the day), 43
(Summer, be seen no more within this wood), and 50 (The heart once broken is a heart no more). In fifteen of the sonnets she frees herself from feminine weaknesses, sonnets 2, 3, 5, 8, 12, 18, 19, 20, 24, 30, 36, 39, 43, 45, and 48 partaking of masculine temper. But ruggedness is not all. Notably lyric is her outpouring in such sonnets as 7, 10, 11, 17, 27, 42, 43, and 52, possibly most truly so in 33:

Sorrowful dreams remembered after waking
Shadow with dolour all the candid day;
Even as I read, the silly tears out-breaking
Splash on my hands and shut the page away
Grief at the root, a dark and secret dolour,
Harder to bear than wind-and-weather grief,
Clutching the rose, draining its cheek of colour,
Drying the bud, curling the opened leaf.
Deep is the pond -- although the edge be shallow,
Frank in the sun, revealing fish and stone,
Climbing ashore to turtle-head and mallow --
Black at the centre beats a heart unknown,
Desolate dreams pursue me out of sleep;
Weeping I wake; waking, I weep, I weep.

Sonnet 5 (Of all that ever in extreme disease "Sweet Love, sweet cruel Love, have pity!" cried) is also particularly distinguished in this respect: Like cool, shaded springs lie the four sonnets housing her more philosophical conceptions: Sonnet 20, which has

Beauty, beyond all feathers that have flown
Is free, you shall not hood her to your wrist,

sonnet 30 with its sombre octet:

Love is not all; it is not meat nor drink
Nor slumber nor a roof against the rain,
Nor yet a floating spar to men that sink
And rise and sink and rise and sink again;
Love cannot fill the thickened lung with breath,
Nor clean the blood, nor set the fractured bone.
Yet many a man is making friends with death,
Even as I speak, for lack of love alone.

and 44 with its

If to be left were to be left alone,
And lock the door and find one's self again --

Read Brahms, read Chaucer,
stretch the shrunken mind
Back to its stature on the rack of thought --
Loss might be said to leave its boon behind.

The heart once broken is a heart no more,
And is absolved from all a heart must be;
All that it signed or chartered heretofore
Is cancelled now, the bankrupt heart is free;
So much of duty as you may require
Of shards and dust, this and no more of pain,
This and no more of more, remorse, desire,
The heart once broken need support again.
How simple 'tis, and what a little sound
It makes in breaking, let the world attest:
It struggles, and it fails; the world goes round,
And the moon follows it. Heart in my breast,
'Tis half a year now since you broke in two:
The world's forgotten well, if the world knew.

Passage after passage of epigrammatic beauty might be cited, but enough has been said upon which to base a judgment. That judgment is, that in these sonnets Miss

Millay has brought back to us the sonnetic heights of former days, has given us a rime and a music and a mood most rare.

Her earlier sonnets, scattered through various volumes, are appreciably inferior to those of "Fatal Interview", lacking their absolute adherence to her chosen rhyme scheme,⁵³ exhibiting vulgarities of rhyme sounds that are very nearly entirely missing from her sequence,⁵⁴ and sometimes parading rather emptily virtual artificialities.⁵⁵ But in one composition she has left a masterful imprint which one cannot blink away, a sonnet that may with no conceit be said to rank in company with the most seriously great:

Euclid alone hath looked on Beauty bare.
Let all who prate of beauty hold their peace,

53 She favored the Petrarchan structure, using most frequently ABBABBA with CDCDCD, CDCDCE, and CDDCC.

54 Presently, uncertainly, suddenly, incessantly, and their ilk are often present in the early sonnets, and entirely nowhere in evidence in the later. The be, we, free trio are less often in the sequence than in earlier sonnets but still are a weakness. Double rhymes appear in both: laughter, after; places, faces; ended, extended, blended, attended; etc. in the first are matched in sonnets 35, 46, and 47 of the sequence. Nevertheless, the rhyme faults of "Fatal Interview" are negligible in number and in importance.

55 Examples: "The light comes back with Columbine", "I shall forget you presently, my dear", "Only until this cigarette is ended", and "I do but ask that you be always fair".

And lay them prone upon the earth and cease
To ponder on themselves, the while they stare
At nothing, intricately drawn nowhere
In shapes of shifting lineage; let geese
Gabble and hiss, but heroes seek release
From dusty bondage into luminous air.
O blinding hour, O holy, terrible day,
When first the shaft into his vision shone
Of light anatomized! Euclid alone
Hath looked on Beauty bare. Fortunate they
Who, though once only and then but for a day,
Have heard her massive sandals set on stone.

In company with Robinson, Ficke, and Wylie,
Murray has builded an American monument to sonnetal glory.
In their work we are gladdened by the serious regard for
verities of sonnet form and idea. The prospect is prom-
ising for a new era of sonnet richness blending the ex-
cellencies of all periods and sloughing off their mis-
directions.

COMPREHENSIVE SUMMARY

I. INTRODUCTION

The sonnet enjoys an historical importance disproportionate to its size. The fact that it has been held in disrespect by some critics and poets has not prevented it from voicing the profoundest and most personal utterances of the greatest poets. An indication of its worth is contained in the fact that great poetry and great sonnets have been coincident in point of time. Serious sonnet standards are therefore important. It is generally agreed that the most desirable sonnet forms are the Italian structures ABBAABBA CDECDE and ABBAABBA CDCDCD and the Shakespearean structure ABABCD CD EFEFGG. This involves a poem consisting of fourteen decasyllabic rhymes in the iambic measure. The poem has two parts, the first eight lines composing the octet and the last six the sestet. The function of the octet is to present descriptive, narrative and expository circumstances, the personal or universal significance

of which is made clear in the sestet. Poetic character should accumulate in strength and fineness as the sonnet progresses. No superfluous word should be included. No rhyme must be the least bit strained or contain the meanest technical fault. Any unnatural, archaic or inconsequential phrase must be avoided. In a word, anything which is regarded as undesirable in poetry generally must be thought of as impermissible in the sonnet.

II. THE INVENTION OF THE SONNET

The sonnet originated in Palermo, Sicily, at the court of Frederick II, Emperor of Germany, probably not earlier than 1220 A. D. Circumstances pertinent to its nativity were: the simultaneous birth of Italian poetic literature with that of the sonnet and the racial and cultural mixture in Sicily at the time in which the Arabs were unquestionably the intellectual leaders. The most recent study of the sonnet's origin contends that the earlier sonnets were rhymed ABABABAB CDECDE, that the octet division into quatrains was distinctly subordinate to divisions into distichs, that the sestet was divided into tercets, that its inventor was

Giacomo da Lentino, that the octet was derived from the eight-line Sicilian strambotto and the sestet was suggested by a Sicilian variety of the Arabic zagal. The sonnet idea seems to appear in every literature, however ancient. Tuscany, Greece, Palestine, Egypt, India, and Japan offer examples of dual thought development to that of the sonnet. The sonnet was probably not a happy discovery but the culmination of an age-long striving for adequate expression of unified personal experience.

III. ITALIAN SONNETRY

The sonnets of the Frederician Court poets, crude from the modern point of view, display originality and art, and were generally written on amorous themes. This Sicilian school fused the previously nondescript Italian dialects into a flexible unified language. The schools of poetry in Tuscany and in Bologna succeeded the Sicilian. Guido Guinicelli of Bologna was Italy's first poet of high merit. The Tuscany leader, Guittone D'Arezzo, was the first man to stamp the sonnet with its definite poetic form. Chiaro Davanzati dominated the period of transition from

the Sicilian to the Tuscany schools.

A solitary figure in Italian literary history, Dante within forty years raised Italy to the literary level of France and England. Beatrice was his constant inspiration. Not only does his love for her account for the direct beauty of his sonnets, but her death charges the "Divina Commedia" with philosophic reality for himself. Dante shields her identity so successfully and consistently that we have no dependable evidence of her existence. Real or not, Beatrice the woman is pictured in "Vita Nuova" and the personification of philosophical love in "Convita", his two volumes of sonnets. Dante's form was in general ABABABAB in the octet with accompanying sestets embracing many schemes. Today he shares with Petrarch the high place of Italian sonnetry. His influence upon Cino Da Pistoia and Guido Cavalcanti was not great enough for a school to follow him.

Petrarch wrote sonnets in Italian rather than Latin so that his lady Laura might be able to read them, and his self-disparaged sonnets are the basis of his present fame. They are divided into

two parts, one recording his emotion during the life of Laura, the other praising her in death. Nothing can approach these sonnets as an epitomized encyclopedia of emotional love. Like Beatrice, Laura's identity is shrouded in uncertainty. Unlike Dante, Petrarch had a far reaching literary influence, being dominant as late as the age of Elizabeth. Petrarch evolved the classic Italian forms, ABBAABBA CDECDE and CDCDCD. Dante, Petrarch, and Shakespeare are all equals of importance in the sonnet world. In the last of the fifteenth and the first of the sixteenth century, there developed a renaissance of sonnet activity well represented by Ludovico Ariosto, Michaelangelo, Vittoria Colonna, and Torquato Tasso.

IV. LA PLEIADE

Synchronous with the Italian Cinquecento activity, a group of French writers, instigated by Marot and De Saint Gelais and flowering most brilliantly in Ronsard and his disciple Desportes, attempted to lift French poetry above the existing level of ballads and rondeaux particularly by popularizing the difficult, exacting, yet pleasing sonnet. They called themselves "La Pleiade".

Their probable sources were: medieval French verse; the later poetry of Marot and Gelais; Petrarchan Italy; and Grecian literature. Their sestets were incorrectly divided and their sonnets employed five rhymed couplets within the fourteen lines. The oblivion into which they have descended is undeserved. They are important here because their version of Italian sonnetry was taken up by the Elizabethans.

V. THE AGE OF ELIZABETH

Like Italy in 1200, England in 1500 had no assured linguistic form. Chaucer contributed the pentameter line, discovered, presumably, in Italy. The novitiate Tudor line required a vigorous poetry. Italy and France contributed Petrarchismo, which was extremely intellectual, cynically immoral, and Platonically idealistic.

Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, wrote the first English sonnets. Jointly they brought from their residence in Italy an admiration of Italian literature resulting in translations of Italian sonnets. Their forms differ, that of Wyatt being prevailingly ABBAABBA with CDD CEE, or CDDC EE; that of Surrey's being an adaptation of the

Italian strambotto to the sonnet form ABABABABABABCC to ABABABABABCDCEE. The first English sonnet was probably Wyatt's "Caesar, when that the traitor of Egypt". Surrey's sonnets were the better poetically. They were published jointly in "Tottel's Miscellany" seven times between 1557 and 1584. Queen Mary's turbulent reign retarded the sonnet's development, but in 1571, Sir Philip Sidney's use of the form occasioned the prolixity of that decade. With Spenser and Lodge, he openly turned to the French version of Italian sonnet tradition. Sidney Lee judges this to be an evidence of unpardonable plagiarism, but their practice is defended by Prosser Hall Frye, who declared that their true service was an advance in language and versification, that they constitute in other words, an apprentice period commendable as such.

The incredible output of the decade from 1590 to 1600 includes the famous sequences of Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare. Lesser poets who contributed to that output were Samuel Daniels, Henry Constable, Thomas Lodge, George Fletcher, Barnabe Barnes, Thomas Watson, Michael Drayton, William Percy, Richard Barnefield, William Smith, Richard Linche,

and Bartholomew Griffin. Sir Fulke-Greville, William Drummond and William Alexander wrote after 1600.

Sir Philip Sidney's contribution was the sonnet sequence "Stella", a group pervaded by unquestioned sincerity, an expressive silhouette, of an inherently artistic personality against a background of hopeless love. They have lasted with Shakespeare's sonnets because they partake of the essence of life. Stella, who was Penelope Rich, and Sidney were betrothed in their youth but she later married Mr. Rich. All but the last two of the sonnets deal with the poignancy of his unrequited love, with her beauty and cruelty; the last two berate with Shakespearean fierceness his former complacency with his state. Edmund Spenser's sequence, "Amoretti", tells in eighty-eight sonnets what might have been told in twenty: the beauty, cruelty, and adaptive temperament of the country girl he married in his forty-third year. The disappointment born of these characteristics is forgotten frequently in the varied beauty of his expressive lyric voice, his sonnets, individually considered, being quite regularly clean,

leaping arcs into elemental beauty. Michael Drayton's sequence exhibits poetic skill and mood in some part of every sonnet. In one in particular he has written a passage that is without superior in any poem written by any poet. He sounds an emotional conception similar in immensity to Shakespeare's, not with Shakespeare's imperial style but like a human person. His sonnets are notable for the introduction of an element sometimes vicious, always rugged, characteristic of his personal attitude toward anything in his craft resembling complacent ignorance. In Shakespeare, achievement in the English sonnet reaches its pinnacle. His sonnets are embodiments of broad understanding made beautiful in stately and moving verse. He completes the freeing of Elizabethan sonnetry from the tradition of Petrarchismo begun by Drayton. In eleven years, he uses but one rhyme scheme, ABABCD CD EFEFGG, accommodating thereby the sonnet idea with English paucity of rhyme. His people are personable; his lady is beautiful and mysterious; his language regards only suitability. His sonnets seem to begin in full stride, each to have no perceptible starting effort. His chief tech-

nical fault is that one out of seven of his final couplets is marred by the weak rhyme sound i. The brilliant, intellectual, terse John Donne wrote strangely metered lyrics and led a varied, adventurous life before his marriage. After a fifteen year period of marital poverty, he entered the Anglican ministry and eventually became Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral. "Holy Sonnets" contains specimens typical of his in every way: of his metrical oddity, nonchalant rhyme, recondite thought, and harsh sounding consonants. His early concern with passionate love gave way to a later passion for religious truth. John Milton is the high priest as Shakespeare is the emperor of English literature. He wrote only twenty-three sonnets, five in Italian, characterized by many technical defects almost forgotten in the sonority, austerity, and depth of his poetry. His typical octet scheme was ABBAABBA accompanied by miscellaneous sestet variations. He left Shakespeare's form with Shakespeare, setting thereby the mould of the English sonnet until the modern era re-evaluated tradition.

VI. WORDSWORTH, KEATS, THE VICTORIANS, AND THE BEGINNINGS IN AMERICA.

Wordsworth and Keats are the only two son-

neteers of major stature between Milton's time and the present. Wordsworth continued the Miltonic standard of high dignity, visiting it with an emotional richness never before attained, interweaving matters of the intellect, the soul, fancy, and the passion. Out of his wealth of genius he constructed more than 400 sonnets, 350 of which will be to his permanent discredit. Only half a score are perfect, but those have not been surpassed. He is the father of the sonnetal abuses which were prevalent until the later works of Millay, Wylie, and Ficke. He scorned poetic labor, feeling that the integrity of genius was jeopardized by it.

In John Keats' first volume of poems appeared "Upon Looking Into Chapman's Homer", a sonnet as nearly without structural fault as any in the language, as rich, too, in idea and feeling. Leigh Hunt, a leading critic of the time and idol of the boy poet, failing to recognize its excellence, turned his sonnet interests into less noble channels. In spite of himself and his tutors, however, at the moments when he felt most deeply his tragedy he cried out with the full force of genius in the disparaged sonnet form.

The sonnets of the Victorian period were affected by four influences: (1) The Rossetti-led group, self-styled "Pre-Raphaelites", who attempted to bring to bear upon the classical vogue of their day the ideals of simplicity, sincerity, and religious mysticism of Italian painters before Raphael. Rossetti, Meredith, and Swinburne were under its influence most directly but Matthew Arnold as well as Tennyson and Byron shared its aesthetic aim. The practical result in sonnet creation was a "painter's poetry", stiff, mechanical, over-attentive to exactitude of detail, yet engaging the mind with vividly imaged processions. (2) The Miltonic example of high subject and tone. (3) The "wave" theory favored by contemporary critics. (4) The Wordsworthian carelessnesses. The Victorian period will probably be considered a transition between the sonnetry of Milton, Wordsworth, and Keats and the frankness of the modern period.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote love lyrics of fourteen lines utilizing the rhyme scheme ABBAABBACDCDCD, respecting no definite sestet break, exemplifying the current fondness for weak rhyme sounds, and possessing a tone rather too sentimental to withstand the centuries.

Charles Tennyson Turner deserves historic mention only because his pretty phrases were popular in his day. Matthew Arnold could use the sonnet line to moving purpose but not within the sonnet form, in which he paraded artificialities. He is the most striking example of the banal side of the Wordsworthian inheritance. Dante Gabriel Rossetti most consistently illustrated the mechanical sonnet. His sonnet sequence, "The House of Life", containing 104 related yet distinct love moments, constitutes his chief claim to sonnet fame. His very insistence upon packing meaning and sound into a word or short phrase destroyed the rhythm of the sonnet as a whole to the extent that we have many phrases of individual beauty from his pen but no sonnet of sustained beauty. His application of the "wave" theory to his own work resulted in a tragic misconception of sonnet function. George Meredith wrote sonnets as good as his best novels. "Lucifer in Starlight" achieved greatness. "Modern Love," a series of sixteen-line "mock-sonnets", tells subtly and intensely the story of his unpleasant married years. An intellectual embodiment of natural realism was his chief poetic characteristic. His poetry has the vigor and unorthodox language of Browning and the melodic lilt of Swinburne. He often

essayed sonnet pictures of revered masters in literature, well illustrated by his sonnet to Robert Browning, which failed to anticipate the modern technique in portraiture sonnets. Christina Rossetti left a large volume of poetry marked by sweetness, balance, and aesthetic sensitiveness. Most of her life she endured hardship and encountered sorrow. Her religious fixation compelled her to refuse two estimable suitors. Too little polishing and too much experimentation in rhyme sequence mar poems that would otherwise be notable. She paints with a water color paleness and with a stroke of deeply rooted melancholy. Swinburne's sonnets are poems of dedication, hardly significant enough to deserve detailed attention. David Gray wrote several sonnet groups before his early death from tuberculosis in which a truly alive quality is portrayed with immature skill. The student and critic, John Addington Symonds, attempted the sonnet medium with surprisingly good results.

In America, William Cullen Bryant wrote the first sonnets of worth, usually upon some theme of nature. As a beginning they are praiseworthy. Longfellow was the next to employ the form with good effect. The six sonnets called, "Divina Commedia" as well as the ensuing individual sonnets earned for him the respect of many who disapprove

of his more early verse. George Henry Boker and Richard Henry Stoddard were well known early in the transition period: the one for his sonnets on love, philosophy, and patriotism; the other for his eulogistic works. Thomas Bailey Aldrich achieved a later and more lasting fame with sonnets delicately expressive of a mental attitude one plane removed from direct experience. In the South, Paul Hamilton Hayne, leader of the Charleston cultural circle, lightened a life made dreary by extended illness and personal misfortunes caused by the Civil War with facile sonnets. These have not lasted, probably because they did not reveal any personal reaction to his trials. In general, the American sonnet up to this time deviated from the more nearly traditional English sonnet in variety of subject matter and misconception of sonnet unity.

VII. THE MODERN SONNET.

The post-Victorian generation in England was unable to produce a poet to rank with Tennyson, Browning, and Swinburne, and not until 1912, when Gibson, Brooke, Abercrombie, Drinkwater, and Masfield became prominent, was there possible the hope of a renaissance in verse. Wilfred Scawen Blunt and Mrs. Meynell suggest in their

sonnets a leaning toward the modern range with a retention of the Victorian sonnet imperfections. Blunt, the traveler, the champion of popular causes, gave himself wholeheartedly neither to poetic creation nor to political activity but his sonnets, grouped in six sequences, were a constant occupation of his every day. Like Wordsworth, he let the current of his verse run its own course. His innate tendency to examine experience philosophically and his inability to render expression other than in a lyric voice gives his sonnets interest and charm. Austin Dobson's latterly acquired love for personable and somewhat biographical essays of little known people colored his infrequent sonnet composition, as in the oft-quoted "Don Quixote". Eugene Lee-Hamilton wrote a memorable series of sonnets, called "Sonnets of the Wingless Hours", during a paralytic illness lasting twenty years. He succeeded in regaining his health and married most congenially. Illness returned, however, upon the death of his two year old daughter, this time to stay. "Mimma Bella" presents the tragedy of his personal loss in a full-emotioned sequence of sonnets. Strictly speaking, however, his poems are not sonnets; his conception of sonnet nature as given in his poem on the sonnet precludes that possi-

bility. Alice Thompson Meynell in early life wrote some excellent verse, among which are a few sonnets of enduring fibre, one of which, "Renouncement," must be included among the half-dozen great emotional sonnets in the language. The critic, Sir Edmund Gosse, wrote some melodic but unimpressive sonnets on oriental themes. Philip Bourke Marston's sonnets followed the Victorian eccentricities, becoming more and more melancholy as total blindness enshrouded him. In America, Richard Watson Gilder, George Santayana, and Richard Hovey are the leading sonnet writers of this period, Santayana's calm reflectiveness redeeming sonnets somewhat undistinguished otherwise. Richard Hovey approached modernity in his sonnets, but death halted his development at the age of thirty-six.

The modern period of poetry, stimulated in 1912 by Miss Millay's "Renascece", flared in a formidable imagistic movement which almost completely declined after 1920. It bequeathed to the period its great emphasis on the quality of sincere simplicity. The modern sonnet exposes four characteristics: (1) a modification of the tradition of sonnet austerity, (2) an extension of subject-matter, (3) increased intimacy of mood, and

(4) a corresponding informality of manner. It is exceptional also for E. A. Robinson's development of the sonnet of portraiture and for a note of ecstatic singing lyricism. The war seriously affected the new movement, in England particularly, for it robbed literature of Brooke, Kettle, Owen, and Sorley. The Georgian group, formed in 1912, discontinued its publishing activities in 1917. The inclusion of Masfield, Drinkwater, Sassoon, and Gibson with the group rounds out the list of English modern sonneteers. Masfield is the only one who has written more than a few sonnets. His group of sixty-one sonnets published in 1916 is generally characterized by a paternal presentation of experience more like the older periods than the new. Certain instances, however, transcend this level, notably Wilfred Gibson's sixteen modern sonnets on homely themes. In America a growing interest in the sonnet was resulting in prolific composition, beginning with Lizette Woodworth Reese and continuing through Robinson, Frost, Sterling, Ficke, Wylie, Aiken, and Millay. The American sonnet progressed through its earlier experimental stages to arrive at the critically respectable level of Robinson, Ficke, Wylie,

and Millay. Appraisal of these artists must wait upon the caprice of time, but they give indubitable evidence of at least equalling the achievements of any age in sonnetic literature.

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